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(11) **EP 1 498 783 A1**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**
published in accordance with Art. 158(3) EPC

(43) Date of publication:
19.01.2005 Bulletin 2005/03

(21) Application number: 03746480.7

(22) Date of filing: 14.04.2003

(51) Int Cl.7: **G03G 15/00**

(86) International application number:
PCT/JP2003/004702

(87) International publication number:
WO 2003/087953 (23.10.2003 Gazette 2003/43)

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR
HU IE IT LI LU MC NL PT RO SE SI SK TR**

(30) Priority: 16.04.2002 JP 2002113948
16.04.2002 JP 2002113947

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(54) **IMAGE FORMATION DEVICE, DEVELOPMENT UNIT, AND COMPUTER SYSTEM**

(57) Accurate communication with a developing unit etc. having an element is to be achieved. An image forming apparatus is provided with: a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element with which communication is possible; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and an antenna for wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section; wherein a longitudinal direction of the antenna is in a direction of movement of the moving body. Further, during a period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, a writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit.

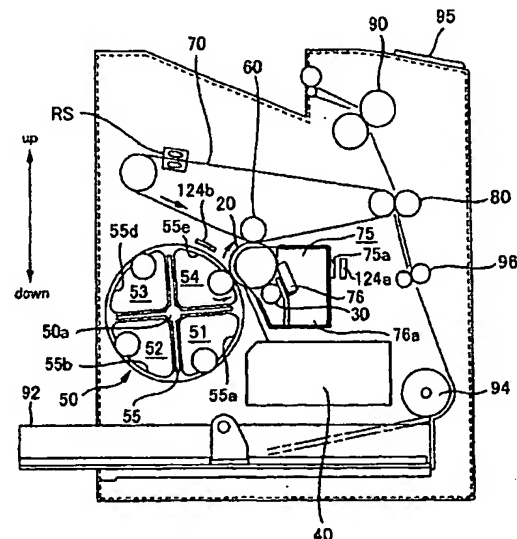


FIG. 2

Description

Technical Field

5 [0001] The present invention relates to image forming apparatuses, developing units, and computer systems.

Background Art

10 [0002] Among image forming apparatuses such as laser beam printers, there are those to and from which a developing unit having a memory can be attached and detached and that cause the developing unit, which has been attached, to rotate using a rotating device such as a rotary so as to print in full color a latent image formed on a photoconductor.

[0003] In some apparatuses, when the rotary is positioned at a predetermined position, the developing unit can be attached to and detached from the main body of the image forming apparatus via an attach/detach opening.

15 [0004] Communication is carried out between the memory and the main body of the image forming apparatus so as to read and write various types of information from and into the memory of the developing unit.

[0005] It is necessary that communication between the memory and the main body of the image forming apparatus is carried out properly. For example, when information regarding the remaining amount of toner is to be written into the memory of the developing unit, if a communication error occurs and incorrect information is written, then the remaining amount of toner in the developing unit cannot be managed properly.

20 [0006] The present invention has been made in light of the foregoing problem, and it is an object thereof to achieve image forming apparatuses, developing units, and computer systems with which communication can be accurately carried out with respect to a developing unit, for example, having an element.

[0007] It is a further object of the present invention to achieve image forming apparatuses and computer systems with which information can be accurately written into a developing unit, for example, having an element.

25

Disclosure of Invention

30 [0008] To solve the foregoing problems, a main aspect of the present invention is an image forming apparatus comprising: a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element with which communication is possible; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and an antenna for wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section; wherein a longitudinal direction of the antenna is in a direction of movement of the moving body.

35 [0009] Another main aspect of the present invention is an image forming apparatus comprising: a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element into which information can be written; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; a writing member for writing information into the element; and an attach/detach opening through which the developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section; wherein: in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where the developing unit is in opposition to the photoconductor due to movement of the moving body, development of the latent image with the developer contained in the developing unit is possible; in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from the opposing position due to movement of the moving body, detachment of the developing unit from the attach/detach section via the attach/detach opening is possible; and during a period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit.

40 [0010] Features and objects of the present invention other than the above will become clear in accordance with the description of the present specification and the accompanying drawings.

50 Brief Description of Drawings

[0011]

55 Fig. 1 is a diagram for describing how a developing unit 54 (51, 52, 53) and a photoconductor unit 75 are attached to and detached from a printer unit 10a.

Fig. 2 is a diagram showing main structural components constituting the printer 10.

Fig. 3 is a block diagram showing a control unit 100 provided in the printer 10.

Fig. 4 is a perspective view of a yellow developing unit 54 seen from the perspective of a developing roller 510.

Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional diagram showing main structural components of the yellow developing unit 54.

Fig. 6A is a plan transparent view showing the structure of an element.

Fig. 6B is a block diagram for describing the internal configuration of the element and a send/receive section.

Fig. 7 is a diagram for describing the information stored in a memory cell 54h of the memory 54a.

5 Fig. 8 is a diagram for describing the information stored in a memory cell of the element 54a of the photoconductor unit 75.

Fig. 9A is a diagram for describing the relationship between the element and the printer-side antenna when the yellow developing unit 54 is positioned at a developing position.

10 Fig. 9B is a diagram for describing the relationship between the element and the printer-side antenna when the yellow developing unit 54 is positioned at an attach/detach position.

Fig. 9C is a diagram for describing the relationship between the element and the printer-side antenna when the rotary 55 is positioned at a home position.

Fig. 10 is a flowchart for describing how information is written into the element of the developing unit.

15 Fig. 11 is a flowchart showing an example of how information is written into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75.

Fig. 12 is a diagram showing a first alternative embodiment of the printer-side antenna.

Fig. 13 is a diagram showing another embodiment regarding the arrangement of the elements.

Fig. 14 is a diagram showing a second alternative embodiment of the printer-side antenna.

Fig. 15 is an explanatory diagram showing the external configuration of a computer system.

20 Fig. 16 is a block diagram showing the configuration of the computer system shown in Fig. 15.

[0012] A legend of the main reference characters used in the drawings is described below.

10	printer
25 10a	printer unit 10a
10b	first open/close cover
10c	second open/close cover
10d	photoconductor unit attach/detach opening
10e	developing unit attach/detach opening
30 20	photoconductor
30	charging unit
40	exposing unit
50	YMCK device
51	cyan developing unit
35 52	magenta developing unit
53	black developing unit
54	yellow developing unit
51a, 52a, 53a, 54a	elements
54b	noncontact IC chip
40 54c	resonant capacitor
54d	antenna
54e	rectifier
54f	signal analysis section RF
54g	controller
45 54h	memory cell
55	rotary
55a	central shaft
55b, 55c, 55d, 55e	attach/detach sections
60	first transferring unit
50 70	intermediate transferring body
75	photoconductor unit
75a	element
76	cleaning blade
76a	waste toner containing section
55 80	second transferring unit
90	fusing unit
92	paper supply tray
94	paper supply roller

	95	display unit
	96	resist roller
	100	control unit
	101	main controller
5	102	unit controller
	112	interface
	113	image memory
	120	CPU
	121	serial interface
10	122	printer-side memory (storage element)
	123	send/receive circuit
	124a	printer-side antenna (for communicating with photoconductor unit element)
	124b, 124c, 124d	printer-side antennas (for communicating with developing unit elements)
	125	YMCK developing device drive control circuit
15	126a	AC voltage supply section
	126b	DC voltage supply section
	127	exposing unit drive control circuit
	127a	pixel counter
	510	developing roller (developer bearing roller)
20	520	seal member
	524	seal urging member
	522	seal support metal plate
	530	first toner containing section
	535	second toner containing section
25	540	housing
	541	opening
	545	restriction wall
	550	toner supply roller (toner supply member)
	560	restriction blade
30	560a	rubber section
	560b	rubber support section
	562	blade support metal plate
	570	blade backing member
	1000	computer system
35	1002	computer unit
	1104	display device
	1106	printer
	1108	input device
	1108A	keyboard
40	1108B	mouse
	1110	reading device
	1110A	flexible disk drive device
	1110B	CR-ROM drive device
	1202	internal memory
45	1204	hard disk drive unit
	T	toner
	RS	read sensor for synchronization

Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

- 50
- [0013]** At least the following matters will be made clear by the description of the present specification and the accompanying drawings.
- [0014]** An image forming apparatus comprises: a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing
- 55 unit has a developer containing section and an element with which communication is possible; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and an antenna for wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section; wherein a longitudinal direction of the antenna is in a direction of movement of the moving body.

[0015] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the longitudinal direction of the antenna is in the direction of movement of the moving body, and thus, it is possible to effectively communicate wirelessly with the elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body.

[0016] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the moving body may move rotatively.

[0017] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, it is possible to effectively communicate wirelessly with the elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body, which moves rotatively.

[0018] Further, in the image forming apparatus, a length of the antenna in the longitudinal direction may be longer than a length of the element in the longitudinal direction.

[0019] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, since the length of the antenna in the longitudinal direction is longer than the length of the element in that longitudinal direction, it is possible to wirelessly communicate more effectively with the elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body.

[0020] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be provided at a position that is in opposition to and extending over a first developing unit attached to a first attach/detach section and a second developing unit attached to a second attach/detach section that is adjacent to the first attach/detach section.

[0021] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, since the antenna is provided at a position where it is in opposition to and extends over adjacent developing units, it is possible to wirelessly communicate more effectively with the elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body.

[0022] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be provided at a position that is in opposition to at least either one of a first element provided in/on the first developing unit or a second element provided in/on the second developing unit.

[0023] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, since the antenna is provided at a position where it is in opposition to at least either one of the elements of adjacent developing units, it is possible to wirelessly communicate more effectively with the elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body.

[0024] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be provided more to the outside than the element in a radial direction of rotation of the moving body.

[0025] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, an antenna which is provided more to the outside than the element in the radial direction of rotation of the moving body can be used to wirelessly communicate more effectively with elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body.

[0026] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be provided more to the outside than the element in a direction of a rotation axis of the moving body.

[0027] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, an antenna which is provided more to the outside than the element in the direction of the rotation axis of the moving body can be used to wirelessly communicate more effectively with elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body.

[0028] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be capable of wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit that is moving.

[0029] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, since the antenna can wirelessly communicate with elements of developing units that are moving, the period during which the developing units are moving can be utilized to allow wireless communication with the elements.

[0030] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be used to write information wirelessly into the element of the developing unit that is moving.

[0031] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, since the antenna is used to write information wirelessly into elements of developing units that are moving, the period during which the developing units are moving can be utilized to write information into elements effectively.

[0032] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be capable of communicating with the element in a non-contact state with respect to the element.

[0033] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, it is possible to communicate, in a non-contact state, with the elements of developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body.

[0034] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may be used to write, into the element, information indicating a remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with that element.

[0035] Since the amount of developer that is contained in a developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the remaining amount of developer is appropriately written into the element. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the antenna can be used to write information about the remaining amount.

[0036] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the antenna may write, into the element, information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with that element.

[0037] Since the amount of developer that is contained in a developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the remaining amount of developer is appropriately written into the element. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the antenna can be used to write information about the usage amount.

[0038] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the image forming apparatus may comprise an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage; and during a period from a start to an end of an image forming process, the image forming apparatus may write information into the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section using the antenna when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage.

[0039] If an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage is provided, then when the AC voltage supply section is supplying an AC voltage, there is a possibility that electromagnetic noise will be generated at its periphery.

[0040] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the apparatus writes information into the element using the antenna when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage during a period from the start to the end of an image forming process, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by supplying the AC voltage, for example.

[0041] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the developing unit may have a developer bearing body for bearing developer; and the AC voltage supply section may supply an AC voltage to the developer bearing body.

[0042] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the apparatus writes information into the element using the antenna when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage to the developer bearing body during a period from the start to the end of an image forming process, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by supplying the AC voltage to the developer bearing body, for example.

[0043] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the image forming apparatus may comprise a charging member for charging the photoconductor; and the AC voltage supply section may supply an AC voltage to the charging member.

[0044] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the apparatus writes information into the element using the antenna when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage to the charging member during a period from the start to the end of an image forming process, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by supplying the AC voltage to the charging member, for example.

[0045] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the image forming apparatus may comprise an attach/detach opening through which the developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section; in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where the developing unit is in opposition to the photoconductor due to movement of the moving body, development of the latent image with the developer contained in the developing unit may be possible; in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from the opposing position due to movement of the moving body, detachment of the developing unit from the attach/detach section via the attach/detach opening may be possible; and during a period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the image forming apparatus may write information into the element of the developing unit using the antenna.

[0046] If an attach/detach opening through which a developing unit is attached to and detached from an attach/detach section is provided, there is a possibility that the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section may inadvertently be detached via the attach/detach opening. In particular, since the amount of developer in a developing unit decreases when that developing unit is positioned at the opposing position and developing is carried out, if that developing unit is detached before information about the amount of developer that has been decreased is written into its element, it may not be possible to ascertain the amount of developer contained in the developing unit, for example.

[0047] Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, information about the remaining amount etc. of developer is written into the element of the developing unit using the antenna during the period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body. Therefore, even if the developing unit is detached via the attach/detach opening, information about the amount of developer contained in the developing unit, for example, is written accurately without being affected by noise caused by supplying an AC voltage, for example.

[0048] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the difference between a maximum voltage value and a minimum voltage value of the AC voltage may be 1000 volts or more.

[0049] When the difference between the maximum voltage value and the minimum voltage value of the AC voltage is 1000 volts or more, the electromagnetic noise that is generated also becomes large. With the foregoing image forming apparatus, information is written into the element using the antenna when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage during the period from the start to the end of the image forming process, and thus, information can be written accurately without being affected by the large noise caused by supplying the AC voltage, for example.

[0050] It is also possible to achieve an image forming apparatus comprising: a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element with which communication is possible; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and an antenna for wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section, wherein: a longitudinal direction of the antenna is in a direction of movement of the moving body; the moving body moves rotatively; a length of the antenna in the longitudinal direction is longer than a length of the element in the longitudinal direction; the antenna is provided at a position that is in opposition to and extending over a first developing unit attached to a first attach/detach section and

a second developing unit attached to a second attach/detach section that is adjacent to the first attach/detach section; the antenna is provided at a position that is in opposition to at least either one of a first element provided in/on the first developing unit or a second element provided in/on the second developing unit; the antenna is capable of wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit that is moving; the antenna is capable of communicating with the element in a non-contact state with respect to the element; and the antenna is used to write, into the element, information indicating a remaining amount or a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with that element.

[0051] It is also possible to achieve a developing unit comprising a developer containing section, and an element with which communication is possible; wherein the developing unit is capable of being attached to and detached from an attach/detach section of a main body of an image forming apparatus that includes: a moving body provided with a plurality of the attach/detach sections, the developing unit being attachable to and detachable from one of the attach/detach sections; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and an antenna for wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section; and wherein a longitudinal direction of the element is in a longitudinal direction of the antenna when the developing unit is attached to the attach/detach section.

[0052] With the foregoing developing unit, the longitudinal direction of the element is in the longitudinal direction of the antenna when the developing unit is attached to the attach/detach section, and thus, effective wireless communication with the elements of developing units can be achieved.

[0053] Further, in the developing unit, the developing unit may be capable of being attached to the attach/detach section of the moving body that moves rotatively.

[0054] The foregoing developing unit allows effective wireless communication with respect to an element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section of the moving body, which moves rotatively.

[0055] Further, in the developing unit, the length of the element in the longitudinal direction may be shorter than the length of the antenna in the longitudinal direction.

[0056] The foregoing developing unit allows more effective wireless communication with respect to the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section of the moving body because the length of the element in the longitudinal direction is shorter than the length of the antenna in the longitudinal direction.

[0057] Further, in the developing unit, the element may be capable of communicating with the antenna in a non-contact state with respect to the antenna.

[0058] The foregoing developing unit allows communication with respect to the antenna in a non-contact state.

[0059] Further, in the developing unit, the element may store information indicating a remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with that element.

[0060] Since the amount of developer that is contained in the developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the remaining amount of developer is appropriately stored in the elements. Here, with the foregoing developing unit, it is possible to store information about the remaining amount in the element.

[0061] Further, in the developing unit, the element may store information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with that element.

[0062] Since the amount of developer that is contained in the developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the usage amount of developer is appropriately stored in the elements. Here, with the foregoing developing unit, it is possible to store information about the usage amount in the element.

[0063] It is also possible to achieve a developing unit comprising: an element with which communication is possible using an antenna; and a developer containing section for containing developer; wherein a longitudinal direction of the antenna intersects with a longitudinal direction of the developing unit.

[0064] For example, if the longitudinal direction of the element is in the longitudinal direction of the antenna of a main body of an image forming apparatus when the developing unit is attached to the image forming apparatus main body, then it is possible to achieve effective wireless communication with respect to the element of the developing unit.

[0065] It is also possible to achieve a computer system comprising: a computer unit; and an image forming apparatus that is connected to the computer unit and that includes a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element with which communication is possible, a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed, and an antenna for wirelessly communicating with the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section; wherein a longitudinal direction of the antenna is in a direction of movement of the moving body.

[0066] An image forming apparatus comprises: a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element into which information can be written; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; a writing member for writing information into the element; and an attach/detach opening through which the developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section; wherein in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where the developing unit is in opposition to

the photoconductor due to movement of the moving body, development of the latent image with the developer contained in the developing unit is possible; wherein in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from the opposing position due to movement of the moving body, detachment of the developing unit from the attach/detach section via the attach/detach opening is possible; and wherein during a period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit.

[0067] In a configuration in which a developing unit, which has an element into which information can be written and a developer containing section, can be attached to and detached from an attach/detach section, there is a possibility that the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section may be inadvertently detached via the attach/detach opening. In particular, since the amount of developer in the developing unit decreases when that developing unit is positioned at the opposing position and developing is carried out, if that developing unit is detached before information about the amount of developer that has been decreased is written into its element, it may not be possible to ascertain the amount of developer contained in the developing unit, for example.

[0068] Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information about the remaining amount etc. of developer into the element of the developing unit during the period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body. Therefore, even if the developing unit is detached via the attach/detach opening, information about the amount of developer contained in the developing unit, for example, can be ascertained properly.

[0069] Further, in the image forming apparatus, during a period from when a developer bearing body provided in the developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position ends developing the latent image until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position, the writing member may write information into the element of the developing unit.

[0070] The amount of developer in a developing unit decreases when the latent image is developed by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit during the period from when the developer bearing body provided in the developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position ends developing the latent image until when that developing unit arrives at the detaching position. Consequently, information about the remaining amount, for example, based on the amount of developer that has decreased due to development is written into the element of the developing unit.

[0071] Further, in the image forming apparatus, during a period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member may write information into the element of the developing unit.

[0072] With this image forming apparatus, the time from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when it arrives at the detaching position can be utilized to write information effectively.

[0073] Further, in the image forming apparatus, if, during the period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position, another developing unit adjacent to the developing unit on the upstream side therefrom in a direction of movement of the moving body is to arrive at the opposing position, then the writing member may write information into the element of the developing unit during a period until the other developing unit arrives at the opposing position.

[0074] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information into the element of a developing unit before the other developing unit arrives at the opposing position, and thus, for example, even if the developing unit is forcibly detached after the other developing unit has arrived at the opposing position, information would already be written into its element.

[0075] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the image forming apparatus may comprise an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage; and the writing member may write information into the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage.

[0076] If an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage is provided, then when the AC voltage supply section is supplying an AC voltage, there is a possibility that electromagnetic noise will be generated at its periphery.

[0077] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage. Therefore, information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by supplying the AC voltage, for example.

[0078] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the developing unit may have a developer bearing body for bearing developer; and the AC voltage supply section may supply an AC voltage to the developer bearing body.

[0079] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information into the element of a developing unit attached to an attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage to the developer bearing body, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by the supply of AC voltage to the developer bearing body, for example.

[0080] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the image forming apparatus may comprise a charging member for

charging the photoconductor; and the AC voltage supply section may supply an AC voltage to the charging member.

[0081] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information into the element of a developing unit attached to an attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying AC voltage to the charging member, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by the supply of AC voltage to the charging member, for example.

[0082] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the writing member may write information into the element in a non-contact state with respect to the element.

[0083] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element in a non-contact state with respect to the element, and thus information can be written to the element even if the developing unit is moving.

[0084] Further, in the image forming apparatus, a difference between a maximum voltage value and a minimum voltage value of the AC voltage may be 1000 volts or more.

[0085] When the difference between the maximum voltage value and the minimum voltage value of the AC voltage is 10 00 volts or more, the electromagnetic noise that is generated also becomes large. With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element of the developing unit that is attached to the attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying AC voltage, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by, for example, the large noise caused by the supply of AC voltage.

[0086] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the writing member may write, into the element, information indicating a remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with the element.

[0087] Since the amount of developer that is contained in the developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the amount of remaining developer is appropriately written to the elements. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information indicating the remaining amount of the developer to the element of a developing unit during the period after that developing unit arrives at the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, and thus even if the developing unit is detached via the attach/detach opening, the remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit can be accurately ascertained.

[0088] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the writing member may write, into the element, information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with the element.

[0089] Since the amount of developer that is contained in the developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the amount of remaining developer is appropriately written to the elements. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information indicating the usage amount of the developer to the element of a developing unit during the period after that developing unit arrives at the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, and thus even if the developing unit is detached via the attach/detach opening, the usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit can be accurately ascertained.

[0090] It is also possible to achieve an image forming apparatus comprising: a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element into which information can be written; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; a writing member for writing information into the element; and an attach/detach opening through which the developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section, wherein: in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where the developing unit is in opposition to the photoconductor due to movement of the moving body, development of the latent image with the developer contained in the developing unit is possible; in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from the opposing position due to movement of the moving body, detachment of the developing unit from the attach/detach section via the attach/detach opening is possible; during a period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit; if, during the period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position, another developing unit adjacent to the developing unit on the upstream side therefrom in a direction of movement of the moving body is to arrive at the opposing position, then the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit during a period until the other developing unit arrives at the opposing position; the developing unit has a developer bearing body for bearing developer; the image forming apparatus comprises an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage; the AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to the developer bearing body; the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage to the developer bearing body; the writing member writes information into the element in a non-contact state with respect to the element; a difference between a maximum voltage value and a minimum voltage value of the AC voltage is 1000 volts or more; and the writing member writes, into the element, information indicating a remaining amount or a usage

amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with the element.

[0091] It is also possible to achieve an image forming apparatus comprising: a moving body provided with a plurality of developing unit attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit having a developer containing section is attachable to and detachable from each of the developing unit attach/detach sections; a photoconductor unit attach/detach section to and from which a photoconductor unit can be attached and detached, wherein the photoconductor unit has a photoconductor and an element into which information can be written; a writing member for writing information into the element; and an attach/detach opening through which the developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section, wherein: in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where the developing unit is in opposition to the photoconductor due to movement of the moving body, development of a latent image formed on the photoconductor with the developer contained in the developing unit is possible; in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from the opposing position due to movement of the moving body, detachment of the developing unit from the developing unit attach/detach section via the attach/detach opening is possible; and during a period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member writes information into the element of the photoconductor unit.

[0092] In a configuration in which the developing unit having a developing unit containing section can be attached to and detached from the developing unit attach/detach sections, there is a possibility that the developing unit attached to a developing unit attach/detach section may be inadvertently detached via the attach/detach opening. Here, if the photoconductor unit has an element and information regarding the developing units is written to this element, then there is a possibility that the information stored on the element may be incorrect when the developing unit is inadvertently detached via the attach/detach opening.

[0093] Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, information is written to the element of the photoconductor unit by the writing member during the period after the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, and thus even if the developing unit is inadvertently detached via the attach/detach opening, the accuracy of the information stored on the element can be kept from being impaired.

[0094] Further, in the image forming apparatus, during a period from when a developer bearing body provided in the developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position ends developing the latent image until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position, the writing member may write information into the element of the photoconductor unit.

[0095] The amount of developer in a developing unit decreases when the latent image is developed by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, information is written to the element of the photoconductor unit by the writing member during the period from after developing of the latent image by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position has ended until when that developing unit arrives at the detaching position. Consequently, information about the remaining amount, for example, based on the amount of developer that has been reduced by development is written to the element of the photoconductor unit.

[0096] Further, in the image forming apparatus, during a period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member may write information into the element of the photoconductor unit.

[0097] With this image forming apparatus, the time from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position can be utilized to effectively write information.

[0098] Further, in the image forming apparatus, if, during the period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position, another developing unit adjacent to the developing unit on the upstream side therefrom in a direction of movement of the moving body is to arrive at the opposing position, then the writing member may write information into the element of the photoconductor unit during a period until the other developing unit arrives at the opposing position.

[0099] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element of a developing unit during a period until the other developing unit arrives at the opposing position, and thus even if, for example, the developing unit is forcibly detached after the other developing unit has arrived at the opposing position, information will have already been written to its element.

[0100] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the image forming apparatus may comprise an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage; and the writing member may write information into the element of the photoconductor unit attached to the photoconductor unit attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage.

[0101] If an AC voltage supply section for supplying AC voltage is provided, then when the AC voltage supply section is supplying AC voltage, there is a possibility that electromagnetic noise will be generated at its periphery.

[0102] With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element when the

AC voltage supply section is not supplying AC voltage, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by the supply of the AC voltage, for example.

[0103] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the developing unit may have a developer bearing body for bearing developer; and the AC voltage supply section may supply an AC voltage to the developer bearing body.

[0104] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying AC voltage to the developer bearing body, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by the supply of AC voltage to the developer bearing body, for example.

[0105] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the image forming apparatus may comprise a charging member for charging the photoconductor; and the AC voltage supply section may supply an AC voltage to the charging member.

[0106] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying AC voltage to the charging member, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by noise caused by the supply of AC voltage to the charging member, for example.

[0107] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the writing member may write information into the element in a non-contact state with respect to the element.

[0108] With this image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element in a non-contact state with respect to the element, and thus information can be written to the element without being affected by defects in the mechanical contact point, for example.

[0109] Further, in the image forming apparatus, a difference between a maximum voltage value and minimum voltage value of the AC voltage may be 1000 volts or more.

[0110] When the difference between the maximum voltage value and the minimum voltage value of the AC voltage is 1000 volts or more, the electromagnetic noise that is generated also becomes large. With the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information to the element when the AC voltage supply section is not supplying AC voltage, and thus information can be written accurately without being affected by, for example, the large noise caused by the supply of AC voltage.

[0111] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the writing member may write, into the element, information indicating a remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit.

[0112] Since the amount of developer that is contained in a developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the amount of remaining developer is appropriately written to the element. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information indicating the remaining amount of the developer to the element of the photoconductor unit during the period after the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, and thus even if the developing unit is detached via the attach/detach opening, the remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit can be accurately ascertained.

[0113] Further, in the image forming apparatus, the writing member may write, into the element, information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with the element.

[0114] Since the amount of developer that is contained in a developing unit decreases as developing is carried out, it is preferable that the amount of remaining developer is appropriately written to the element. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, the writing member writes information indicating the usage amount of the developer to the element of the photoconductor unit during the period after the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, and thus even if the developing unit is detached via the attach/detach opening, the usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit can be accurately ascertained.

[0115] It is also possible to achieve a computer system comprising: a computer unit; and an image forming apparatus that is connected to the computer unit and that includes a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of the attach/detach sections, and the developing unit has a developer containing section and an element into which information can be written; a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; a writing member for writing information into the element; and an attach/detach opening through which the developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section; wherein, in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where the developing unit is in opposition to the photoconductor due to movement of the moving body, development of the latent image with the developer contained in the developing unit is possible; and wherein, in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from the opposing position due to movement of the moving body, detachment of the developing unit from the attach/detach section via the attach/detach opening is possible; wherein, during a period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member writes information into the element of the developing unit.

[0116] It is also possible to achieve a computer system comprising: a computer unit; and an image forming apparatus that is connected to the computer unit and that includes a moving body provided with a plurality of developing unit attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit having a developer containing section is attachable to and detachable

from each of the developing unit attach/detach sections; a photoconductor unit attach/detach section to and from which a photoconductor unit can be attached and detached, wherein the photoconductor unit has a photoconductor and an element into which information can be written; a writing member for writing information into the element; and an attach/detach opening through which the developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section; wherein, in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where the developing unit is in opposition to the photoconductor due to movement of the moving body, development of a latent image formed on the photoconductor with the developer contained in the developing unit is possible; and wherein, in a state in which the developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from the opposing position due to movement of the moving body, detachment of the developing unit from the developing unit attach/detach section via the attach/detach opening is possible; wherein, during a period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the moving body, the writing member writes information into the element of the photoconductor unit.

=== Overview of Image Forming Apparatus (Laser Beam Printer) ===

[0117] Next, using Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, an overview of a laser beam printer (hereinafter, also referred to as "printer") 10, taken as an example of the image forming apparatus, is described. Fig. 1 is a diagram for describing a configuration in which a developing unit 54 (51, 52, 53) and a photoconductor unit 75 are attached to and detached from a printer unit 10a. Fig. 2 is a diagram showing main structural components that configure the printer 10. It should be noted that Fig. 2 is a diagram of a cross section taken perpendicular to the X direction in Fig. 1. Further, the up/down direction is shown by an arrow in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, and for example, a paper supply tray 92 is arranged at a lower section of the printer 10 and a fusing unit 90 is arranged at an upper section of the printer 10.

< Attach/Detach Configuration >

[0118] The developing unit 54 (51, 52, 53) and the photoconductor unit 75 can be attached to and detached from the printer unit 10a. The printer 10 is structured by attaching the developing unit 54 (51, 52, 53) and the photoconductor unit 75 to the printer unit 10a.

[0119] The printer unit 10a has a first open/close cover 10b that can be opened and closed, a second open/close cover 10c that can be opened and closed and that is provided more to the inside than the first open/close cover 10b, a photoconductor unit attach/detach opening 10d through which the photoconductor unit 75 is attached and detached, and a developing unit attach/detach opening 10e through which the developing unit 54 (51, 52, 53) is attached and detached.

[0120] Here, when the user opens the first open/close cover 10b, the photoconductor unit 75 can be attached to and detached from the printer unit 10a via the photoconductor unit attach/detach opening 10d. Further, when the user opens the second open/close cover 10c, the developing unit 54 (51, 52, 53) can be attached to and detached from the printer unit 10a via the developing unit attach/detach opening 10e.

<Overview of the Printer 10>

[0121] An overview of the printer 10 in a state in which the developing unit 54 (51, 52, 53) and the photoconductor unit 75 have been attached to the printer unit 10a is described.

[0122] As shown in Fig. 2, the printer 10 according to the present embodiment has a charging unit 30, an exposing unit 40, a YMCK developing device 50, a first transferring unit 60, an intermediate transferring body 70, and a cleaning blade 76, in the direction of rotation of a photoconductor 20, which is a latent image bearing body for bearing a latent image. It further includes a second transferring unit 80, a fusing unit 90, a display unit 95 made of a liquid crystal panel etc. for constituting a means for making a notification to the user, and a control unit 100 (Fig. 3) for controlling these units etc. so as to control the operation of the printer 10.

[0123] The photoconductor 20 has a cylindrical conductive base and a photoconductive layer formed on the outer circumference surface of this base, and can rotate about a central shaft. In this embodiment, the photoconductor rotates in the clockwise direction as shown by an arrow in Fig. 2.

[0124] The charging unit 30 is a device for charging the photoconductor 20, and the exposing unit 40 is a device for forming a latent image on the charged photoconductor 20 by irradiating laser. The exposing unit 40 has, for example, a semiconductor laser, a polygon mirror, and an F- θ lens, and irradiates modulated laser onto the charged photoconductor 20 based on an image signal that is input from a not-shown host computer, such as a personal computer or a word processor.

[0125] The YMCK developing device 50 has a rotary 55, which serves as a moving body, and four developing units attached to the rotary 55. The rotary 55 is capable of rotating, and is provided with four attach/detach sections 55b,

55c, 55d, and 55e to and from which the four developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54 can respectively be attached and detached via the developing unit attach/detach opening 10d. The cyan developing unit 51, which contains cyan (C) toner, can be attached to and detached from the attach/detach section 55b, the magenta developing unit 52, which contains magenta (M) toner, can be attached to and detached from the attach/detach section 55c, the black developing unit 53, which contains black (K) toner, can be attached to and detached from the attach/detach section 55d, and the yellow developing unit 54, which contains yellow (Y) toner, can be attached to and detached from the attach/detach section 55e.

[0126] By rotating, the rotary 55 moves the above-mentioned four developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54 that have been attached to the attach/detach sections 55b, 55c, 55d, and 55e, respectively. That is, the rotary 55 rotates the four attached developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54 about a central shaft 55a while maintaining their relative positions. Then, the developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54 are selectively brought into opposition with the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 so as to develop the latent image on the photoconductor 20 using the toner contained in each of the developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54. It should be noted that the developing units are described in detail later.

[0127] The first transferring unit 60 is a device for transferring a single-color toner image formed on the photoconductor 20 onto the intermediate transferring body 70. When the four colors of toner are successively transferred over one another, a full-color toner image is formed on the intermediate transferring body 70.

[0128] The intermediate transferring body 70 is an endless belt and is rotatively driven at substantially the same circumferential velocity as the photoconductor 20. A read sensor for synchronization RS is provided near the intermediate transferring body 70. The read sensor for synchronization RS is a sensor for detecting the reference position of the intermediate transferring body 70, and obtains a synchronization signal Vsync in the sub-scanning direction, which is perpendicular to the main scanning direction. The read sensor for synchronization RS has a light-emitting section for emitting light and a light-receiving section for receiving light. Light that is emitted from the light-emitting section passes through a hole formed in a predetermined position of the intermediate transferring body 70, and when light is received by the light-receiving section, the read sensor for synchronization RS generates a pulse signal. One pulse signal is generated each time the intermediate transferring body 70 makes one revolution.

[0129] The second transferring unit 80 is a device for transferring the single-color toner image or the full-color toner image formed on the intermediate transferring body 70 onto a recording medium such as paper, film, or cloth.

[0130] The fusing unit 90 is a device for fusing the single-color toner image or the full-color toner image, which has been transferred onto the recording medium, onto the recording medium, such as paper, to make the image into a permanent image.

[0131] The cleaning blade 76 is made of rubber and abuts against the surface of the photoconductor 20. The cleaning blade 76 removes the toner remaining on the photoconductor 20 by scraping it off after the toner image has been transferred onto the intermediate transferring body 70 by the first transferring unit 60.

[0132] The photoconductor unit 75 is provided between the first transferring unit 60 and the exposing unit 40, and has the photoconductor 20, an element 75a to which information can be written, the charging unit 30, the cleaning blade 76, and a waste toner containing section 76a for containing toner that has been scraped off by the cleaning blade 76. It should be noted that the element 75a has a configuration that allows storage of various types of information that have been written in.

[0133] The control unit 100 is made of a main controller 101 and a unit controller 102, as shown in Fig. 3. An image signal is input to the main controller 101, and in accordance with a command based on this image signal, the unit controller 102 controls each of the above-mentioned units etc. to form an image.

=== Operation of Printer 10 ===

[0134] Next, the operation of the printer 10 configured as above is described with reference to other structural components thereof.

[0135] First, when an image signal from a not-shown host computer is input to the main controller 101 of the printer 10 via an interface (I/F) 112, the photoconductor 20 and the intermediate transferring body 70 are rotated due to control by the unit controller 102 based on a command from the main controller 101. Then, the reference position of the intermediate transferring body 70 is detected by the read sensor for synchronization RS, and a pulse signal is output. This pulse signal is sent to the unit controller 102 via a serial interface 121. The unit controller 102 controls the following operation, taking the pulse signal, which has been received, as a reference.

[0136] While rotating, the photoconductor 20 is successively charged by the charging unit 30 at a charging position. The area of the photoconductor 20 that has been charged is brought to an exposing position through the rotation of the photoconductor 20, and a latent image corresponding to image information for a first color, for example, yellow Y, is formed in that area by the exposing unit 40.

[0137] The latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is brought to a developing position through the rotation of the photoconductor 20, and is developed with yellow toner by the yellow developing unit 54. A yellow toner image

is thus formed on the photoconductor 20.

[0138] The yellow toner image that has been formed on the photoconductor 20 is brought to a first transferring position through the rotation of the photoconductor 20 and is transferred onto the intermediate transferring body 70 by the first transferring unit 60. At this time, a first transferring voltage that has a polarity that is opposite from the toner-charge polarity is applied to the first transferring unit 60. It should be noted that throughout this operation the second transferring unit 80 is separated from the intermediate transferring body 70.

[0139] The above process is repeated for the second color, the third color, and the fourth color, and therefore, toner images of each color corresponding to each of the image signals are transferred onto the intermediate transferring body 70 in a superposed manner. Thus, a full-color toner image is formed on the intermediate transferring body 70.

[0140] The full-color toner image that has been formed on the intermediate transferring body 70 is brought to a second transferring position through the rotation of the intermediate transferring body 70 and is transferred onto a recording medium by the second transferring unit 80. It should be noted that the recording medium is carried from the paper supply tray 92 to the second transferring unit 80 via a paper supply roller 94 and a resist roller 96. Further, when performing the transferring operation, the second transferring unit 80 is pressed against the intermediate transferring body 70 and supplied with a second transferring voltage.

[0141] The fusing unit 90 heats and applies pressure to the full-color toner image that has been transferred to the recording medium, and the image is fused to the recording medium.

[0142] On the other hand, after the photoconductor 20 passes the first transferring position, the toner adhering to its surface is scraped off by the cleaning blade 76 and it is prepared for charging for forming the next latent image. The toner that has been scraped off is collected in the waste toner containing section 76a.

=== Overview of Control Unit ===

[0143] Next, the configuration of the control unit 100 is described with reference to Fig. 3. Fig. 3 is a block diagram showing the control unit 100 provided in the printer 10.

[0144] The main controller 101 of the control unit 100 is connected to a host computer via the interface 112, and is provided with an image memory 113 for storing image signals that are received from the host computer.

[0145] The unit controller 102 of the control unit 100 is electrically connected to each of the units (the charging unit 30, the exposing unit 40, the first transferring unit 60, the photoconductor unit 75, the second transferring unit 80, the fusing unit 90, and the display unit 95) and the YMCK developing device 50, and by receiving signals from the sensors provided in these components, the unit controller controls each of these units and the YMCK developing device 50 based on signals input from the main controller 101 as it detects the state of each of these units and the YMCK developing device 50. As the structural components for driving each of these units and the YMCK developing device 50, Fig. 3 shows a photoconductor unit drive control circuit, a charging unit drive control circuit, an exposing unit drive control circuit 127, a YMCK developing device drive control circuit 125, a first transferring unit drive control circuit, a second transferring unit drive control circuit, a fusing unit drive control circuit, and a display unit drive control circuit.

[0146] The exposing unit drive control circuit 127 connected to the exposing unit 40 has a pixel counter 127a that serves as consumption amount detection means for detecting the amount of consumption of developer. The pixel counter 127a counts the number of pixels that are input to the exposing unit 40. It should be noted that it is also possible to provide the pixel counter 127a in the exposing unit 40 or in the main controller 101. It should be noted that the number of pixels is the number of pixels in units of basic resolution of the printer 10, or in other words, the number of pixels of the image that is actually printed. The amount of consumption of toner T (the usage amount) is proportional to the number of pixels, and therefore, by counting the number of pixels, it is possible to detect the amount of consumption of toner T.

[0147] To the YMCK developing device drive control circuit 125, an AC voltage is supplied from an AC voltage supply section 126a and a DC voltage is supplied from a DC voltage supply section 126b. The YMCK developing device drive control circuit 125 applies a voltage, which is obtained by superimposing the AC voltage and the DC voltage, to a developing roller at a suitable timing to form an alternating electric field between the developing roller and the photoconductor.

[0148] Further, the CPU 120 provided in the unit controller 102 is connected to a nonvolatile storage element (hereinafter, also referred to as "printer-side memory") 122 such as a serial EEPROM via the serial interface (I/F) 121.

[0149] Further, the CPU 120 is capable of wirelessly communicating with elements 51a, 52a, 53a, and 54a, which are respectively provided in/on the developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54, via the serial interface 121, a send/receive circuit 123, and a printer-side antenna (antenna for communicating with the developing unit elements) 124b. The CPU 120 is also capable of wirelessly communicating with the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 via the serial interface 121, the send/receive circuit 123, and a printer-side antenna (antenna for communicating with the photoconductor unit element) 124a. At the time of wireless communication, the antenna 124b for communicating with the developing unit elements, which serves as a writing member, writes information into the elements 51a, 52a, 53a, and 54a

of the developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54, respectively. The antenna 124b for communicating with the developing unit elements, which serves as a writing member, is also capable of reading information from the elements 51a, 52a, 53a, and 54a of the developing units 51, 52, 53, and 54, respectively. At the time of wireless communication, the antenna 124a for communicating with the photoconductor unit element, which serves as a writing member, writes information into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75. The antenna 124a for communicating with the photoconductor unit element, which serves as a write means, can also read information from the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75.

=== Overview of Developing Units ===

[0150] Next, an overview of the developing units is described using Fig. 4 and Fig. 5. Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the yellow developing unit 54 seen from the side of a developing roller 510. Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional view showing main structural components of the yellow developing unit 54. It should be noted that in Fig. 5 as well, the up/down direction is shown by an arrow, and for example, the central axis of the developing roller 510 is located lower than the central axis of the photoconductor 20. Further, in Fig. 5, the yellow developing unit 54 is shown in a state in which it is positioned at a developing position that is in opposition to the photoconductor 20.

[0151] The YMCK developing device 50 is provided with the cyan developing unit 51, which contains cyan (C) toner, the magenta developing unit 52, which contains magenta (M) toner, the black developing unit 53, which contains black (K) toner, and the yellow developing unit 54, which contains yellow (Y) toner. Since the configuration of each of these developing units is the same, the yellow developing unit 54 is described below.

[0152] The yellow developing unit 54 is provided with, for example, a developer containing section, that is, a first containing section 530 and a second containing section 535 for containing yellow toner T which serves as the developer, the element 54a, a housing 540, the developing roller 510 which serves as the developer bearing roller, a toner supply roller 550 for supplying toner T to the developing roller 510, and a restriction blade 560 for restricting the thickness of the layer of toner T that is borne on the developing roller 510.

[0153] The housing 540 is manufactured by joining, for example, an upper housing and a lower housing which have been integrally molded, and the inside of the housing is divided into the first containing section 530 and the second containing section 535 by a restriction wall 545 that extends upward from the lower section (in the up/down direction of Fig. 5). The first containing section 530 and the second containing section 535 form developer containing sections (530, 535) for containing toner T which serves as a developer. The upper sections of the first containing section 530 and the second containing section 535 are in communication, and the movement of the toner T between them is restricted by the restriction wall 545. It should be noted that it is also possible to provide a stirring member for stirring the toner T contained in the first containing section 530 and the second containing section 535. In the present embodiment, however, each of the developing units (the cyan developing unit 51, the magenta developing unit 52, the black developing unit 53, and the yellow developing unit 54) rotates in conjunction with the rotation of the rotary 55 so that the toner T in each developing unit is stirred. Therefore, a stirring member is not provided in the first containing section 530 or the second containing section 535.

[0154] The element 54a, into which information can be written, is provided on the outer surface of the housing 540. The element 54a has a configuration that allows written information to be stored. To effectively write information into the element 54a, the longitudinal direction of the element 54a intersects with the longitudinal direction of the yellow developing unit 54. More preferably, it is also possible to achieve a configuration in which the longitudinal direction of the element 54a is perpendicular to the longitudinal direction of the yellow developing unit 54. The element 54a will be described in greater detail later, but here it should be noted that the element 54a is provided with an antenna 54d, and that the longitudinal direction of the antenna 54a also intersects with the longitudinal direction of the yellow developing unit 54.

[0155] An opening 541 that communicates with the outside of the housing 540 is provided in the lower section of the first containing section 530. The toner supply roller 550 is provided in the first containing section 530 with its circumferential surface facing the opening 541, and is rotatably supported on the housing 540. Further, the developing roller 510 is provided with its circumferential surface facing the opening 541 from outside the housing 540, and the developing roller 510 abuts against the toner supply roller 550.

[0156] The developing roller 510 bears toner T and carries the toner to a developing position, which is in opposition to the photoconductor 20. The developing roller 510 is made of, for example, aluminum, stainless steel, or iron, and if necessary, it can be subjected to nickel plating or chromium plating, and the toner bearing region can be subjected to sandblasting or the like. Further, the developing roller 510 can rotate about its central axis, and as shown in Fig. 5, it rotates in the opposite direction (in Fig. 5, the counterclockwise direction) to the rotating direction of the photoconductor 20 (in Fig. 5, the clockwise direction). Its central axis is located lower than the central axis of the photoconductor 20. Further, as shown in Fig. 5, in a state in which the yellow developing unit 54 is in opposition to the photoconductor 20, a gap exists between the developing roller 510 and the photoconductor 20. That is, the yellow developing unit 54 develops the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 in a non-contacting state. It should be noted that when

the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed, an alternating electric field is generated between the developing roller 510 and the photoconductor 20.

[0157] The toner supply roller 550 supplies, to the developing roller 510, the toner T contained in the first containing section 530 and the second containing section 535. The toner supply roller 550 is made of polyurethane foam, for example, and abuts against the developing roller 510 in a state in which it is elastically deformed. The toner supply roller 550 is arranged at a lower section of the first containing section 530, and the toner T contained in the first containing section 530 and the second containing section is supplied to the developing roller 510 by the toner supply roller 550 at the lower section of the first containing section 530. The toner supply roller 550 can rotate about its central axis, and its central axis is located lower than the central rotation axis of the developing roller 510. Further, the toner supply roller 550 rotates in the opposite direction (in Fig. 5, the clockwise direction) to the rotating direction of the developing roller 510 (in Fig. 5, the counterclockwise direction). It should be noted that the toner supply roller 550 has the function of supplying the toner T that is contained in the first containing section 530 and the second containing section 535 to the developing roller 510 as well as the function of stripping off, from the developing roller 510, the toner T that remains on the developing roller 510 after development.

[0158] The restriction blade 560 restricts the thickness of the toner T layer borne by the developing roller 510, and gives charge to the toner T borne by the developing roller 510. The restriction blade 560 has a rubber section 560a and a rubber support section 560b. The rubber section 560a is made of, for example, silicone rubber or urethane rubber, and the rubber support section 560b is a thin plate made of, for example, phosphor bronze or stainless steel, and has a springy characteristic. The rubber section 560a is supported by the rubber support section 560b, and one end of the rubber support section 560b is fixed to a blade support metal plate 562. The blade support metal plate 562 is fastened to a seal frame 526, which is described later, and is attached to the housing 540 together with the restriction blade 560, forming a part of a seal unit 520, which is described later. In this state, the rubber section 560a is pressed against the developing roller 510 by the elastic force created by the flexure of the rubber support section 560b.

[0159] Further, a blade backing member 570 made of Moltoprene or the like is provided on one side of the restriction blade 560 opposite from the side of developing roller 510. The blade backing member 570 prevents the toner T from entering in between the rubber support section 560b and the housing 540 to stabilize the elastic force caused by the flexure of the rubber support section 560b, and also presses the rubber section 560a against the developing roller 510 by applying force to the rubber section 560a toward the developing roller 510 from directly behind the rubber section 560a. Consequently, the blade backing member 570 improves the contact uniformity and the sealing properties of the rubber section 560a with respect to the developing roller 510.

[0160] The end of the restriction blade 560 on the side opposite from the side supported by the blade support metal plate 562, that is, its tip, is not in contact with the developing roller 510; rather, a section at a predetermined distance from its tip contacts, with some breadth, the developing roller 510. That is, the restriction blade 560 does not abut against the developing roller 510 at its edge but rather at its mid section. Further, the restriction blade 560 is arranged such that its tip is facing upstream in the rotating direction of the developing roller 510, and thus, makes a so-called counter-abutment with respect to the roller. It should be noted that the abutting position where the restriction blade 560 abuts against the developing roller 510 is located lower than the central axis of the developing roller 510 and is also located lower than the central axis of the toner supply roller 550.

[0161] The seal member 520 prevents the toner T in the yellow developing unit 54 from spilling out from the unit, and also collects the toner T on the developing roller 510, which has passed the developing position, into the developing unit without scraping it off. The seal member 520 is a seal made of polyethylene film or the like. The seal member 520 is supported by a seal support metal plate 522, and is attached to the frame 540 via the seal support metal plate 522. A seal urging member 524 made of Moltoprene or the like is provided on one side of the seal member 520 opposite from the side of the developing roller 510, and due to the elastic force of the seal urging member 524, the seal member 520 is pressed against the developing roller 510. It should be noted that the abutting position where the seal member 520 abuts against the developing roller 510 is located above the central axis of the developing roller 510.

[0162] In the yellow developing unit 54 configured in this manner, the toner supply roller 550 supplies, to the developing roller 510, the toner T that is contained in the first containing section 530 and the second containing section 535, which serve as developer containing sections. The toner T that is supplied to the developing roller 510 is brought to the abutting position of the restriction blade 560 in conjunction with the rotation of the developing roller 510, and when it passes the abutting position, the thickness of the toner layer is restricted and the toner is charged. Then, due to further rotation of the developing roller 510, the toner T on the developing roller 510, whose layer thickness has been restricted, is brought to the developing position opposing the photoconductor 20, and is used for developing the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 under the alternating electric field at the developing position. The toner T on the developing roller 510 that has passed the developing position due to further rotation of the developing roller 510 passes the seal member 520 and is collected into the developing unit by the seal member 520 without being scraped off.

=== Configuration of Elements ===

[0163] Next, the configuration of the elements of the developing units and the element of the photoconductor unit, including the configuration for sending and receiving data, is described with reference to Fig. 6A, Fig. 6B, Fig. 7, and Fig. 8. Fig. 6A is a plan perspective view showing the configuration of an element. Fig. 6B is a block diagram for describing the internal configuration of the element and the send/receive section. Fig. 7 is a diagram for describing the information stored in a memory cell 54h of the element 54a. Fig. 8 is a diagram for describing the information stored in the memory cell of the element 54a of the photoconductor unit 75.

[0164] Since the elements of the developing units other than the yellow developing unit 54 also have the same configuration, the element 54a of the yellow developing unit 54 is taken as an example and described below.

[0165] If the element 54a and the printer-side antenna 124b are in a predetermined positional relationship, for example, if they are within 10 mm of one another, information can be sent and received without the element and the antenna being in contact with one another. The element 54a is overall very compact and thin, and one of its sides can be made adhesive and can be made to adhere to an object as a sticker. It is known as a memory tag, for example, and is sold commercially in various forms.

[0166] The element 54a has a non-contact IC chip 54b, a resonant capacitor 54c that is formed by etching a metal film, and a flat coil serving as an antenna 54d. These are mounted onto a plastic film and covered by a transparent coversheet.

[0167] The printer unit 10a has a coil that serves as the printer-side antenna 124b, the send/receive circuit 123, and the serial interface 121 that is connected to the controller (CPU) 120 of the printer unit 10a.

[0168] The non-contact IC chip 54b has a rectifier 54e, a signal analysis section RF (Radio Frequency) 54f, a controller 54g, and the memory cell 54h. The memory cell 54h is a nonvolatile memory that can be electrically read and written, such as a NAND flash ROM, and is capable of storing information that has been written and allows the stored information to be read from the outside.

[0169] The antenna 54d of the element 54a and the printer-side antenna 124b wirelessly communicate with one another to read information stored in the memory cell 54h and write information into the memory cell 54h. Further, the high frequency signals that are generated by the send/receive circuit 123 of the printer unit 10a are induced as a high frequency magnetic field via the printer-side antenna 124b. This high frequency magnetic field is absorbed via the antenna 54d of the element 54a, is rectified by the rectifier 54e, and becomes a DC power source for driving each of the circuits in the IC chip 54b.

[0170] The memory cell 54h of the element 54a stores various types of information, as shown in Fig. 7. The address 00H stores unique ID information for each element, such as the serial number of the element. The address 01H stores the date that the developing unit was manufactured. The address 02H stores information for specifying the destination of the developing unit. The address 03H stores information for specifying the manufacturing line on which the developing unit was manufactured. The address 04H stores information for specifying models with which the developing unit is compatible. The address 05H stores toner remaining amount information as information indicating the amount of toner that is contained in the developing unit. The address 06H and subsequent areas store appropriate information.

[0171] The ID information that is stored on the memory cell 54h of the element 54a can be written at the time that the storage element is manufactured in the factory. The main unit of the printer 10 can read this ID information to identify each of the elements 54a, 51a, 52a, and 53a.

[0172] It should be noted that the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 has the same configuration. The memory cell of the element of the photoconductor unit 75 stores various types of information, as shown in Fig. 8.

[0173] The address 00H stores unique ID information for each element, such as the serial number of the element. The address 01H stores the date that the photoconductor unit was manufactured. The address 02H stores information for specifying the destination of the photoconductor unit. The address 03H stores information for specifying the manufacturing line on which the photoconductor unit was manufactured. The address 04H stores information for specifying models with which the photoconductor unit is compatible. The address 05H stores information indicating the total number of printed sheets of the printer unit 10a when the photoconductor unit is attached to the printer unit 10a. The address 06H stores information indicating the total number of printed sheets of the printer unit 10a when the photoconductor unit has reached its service life and is detached from the printer unit 10a. The address 07H stores the number of sheets for which color printing has been performed using the photoconductor unit. The address 08H stores the number of sheets for which monochrome printing has been performed using the photoconductor unit. The address 09H stores the number of sheets developed by the yellow developing unit 54, that is, the number of sheets printed using yellow toner. The address 0AH stores the number of sheets developed by the magenta developing unit 52, that is, the number of sheets printed using magenta toner. The address 0BH stores the number of sheets developed by the cyan developing unit 51, that is, the number of sheets printed using cyan toner. The address 0CH stores the number of sheets developed by the black developing unit 53, that is, the number of sheets printed using black toner. The address 0DH and subsequent areas store appropriate information.

=== Relationship Between Element and Printer-side Antenna ===

[0174] Next, the relationship between the elements of the developing units and the printer-side antenna 124b is described with reference to Fig. 9A through C. Fig. 9A is a diagram for describing the relationship between the element and the printer-side antenna when the yellow developing unit 54 is positioned at the developing position. Fig. 9B is a diagram for describing the relationship between the element and the printer-side antenna when the yellow developing unit 54 is positioned at the attach/detach position. Fig. 9C is a diagram for describing the relationship between the element and the printer-side antenna when the rotary 55 is positioned at the home position.

[0175] In Fig. 9A, the yellow developing unit 54 is positioned at the developing position (opposing position), and the element 54a of the yellow developing unit 54 is in opposition to the printer-side antenna 124b in a non-contact state.

[0176] The printer-side antenna 124b is provided so that its longitudinal direction (in Fig. 9A, the Y direction) is in the direction of rotation of the rotary 55 (in Fig. 9A, the Z direction). By arranging the printer-side antenna 124b in this manner, wireless communication can be carried out effectively between the printer-side antenna 124b and the element 54a. That is, the printer-side antenna 124b can wirelessly communicate with the element 54a not only in the state shown in Fig. 9A but also in a state in which the rotary 55 has been rotated by a predetermined angle. By making the longitudinal direction of the printer-side antenna 124b follow the direction of rotation of the rotary 55, the range of angle of rotation of the rotary 55 in which wireless communication is possible can be made large.

[0177] Also, the length of the printer-side antenna 124b in the longitudinal direction is longer than the length of the element 54a in that longitudinal direction. Thus, it is possible to achieve more effective wireless communication with respect to the element 54a of the yellow developing unit 54 that has been attached to the attach/detach section 55e provided in the rotary 55.

[0178] Further, the printer-side antenna 124b is provided more to the outside than the element 54a in the radial direction of rotation of the rotary 55. Thus, using the printer-side antenna 124b, which is provided more to the outside than the element 54a in the radial direction of rotation of the rotary 55, effective wireless communication with respect to the element 54a of the yellow developing unit 54 can be achieved.

[0179] It should be noted that the printer-side antenna 124b can wirelessly communicate with the element 54a not only when the rotary 55 is in a stopped state but also when the rotary 55 is in a moving state. That is, the printer-side antenna 124b can wirelessly communicate with the element 54a even if the element is moving.

[0180] Further, the printer-side antenna 124a is in opposition to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 in a non-contact state (see Fig. 2), and the printer-side antenna 124a can wirelessly communicate with the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 in a non-contact state.

=== Rotation of Rotary 55 and Attach/Detach Position (Attaching and Detaching Position) of Developing Units ===

[0181] Next, the relationship between the rotation of the rotary 55 and the position where the developing units are detached is described with reference again to Fig. 9A to Fig. 9C.

[0182] As described above, in the state shown in Fig. 9A, the yellow developing unit 54 is positioned at the developing position. When the rotary 55 is rotated from this state by a predetermined angle in the Z direction, the state shown in Fig. 9B is attained. In the state shown in Fig. 9B, the yellow developing unit 54 is positioned at the developing position. In this state, the yellow developing unit 54 can be attached and detached via the attach/detach opening 10e, that is, it can be mounted to the attach/detach section 55e or it can be removed from the attach/detach section 55e. Then, when the rotary 55 is rotated from the state shown in Fig. 9B by a predetermined angle in the Z direction, the cyan developing unit 51, which is positioned upstream in the direction of rotation of the rotary 55, is positioned at the developing position.

[0183] It should be noted that Fig. 9C shows a state in which the rotary 55 is positioned at the home position after the printer 10 has been turned ON and the initialization operation has been performed.

=== Writing Information into Elements of Developing Units ===

[0184] Next, the writing of information into the elements of the developing units is described with reference to Fig. 10. Fig. 10 is a flowchart for describing how information is written into the elements of the developing units.

< Step of Standby for Image Forming Process (Step 1) >

[0185] When the printer 10 is turned ON, a predetermined initialization operation is performed, and the printer 10 enters an image forming process standby state. When an image signal, which is an image forming process command from the host computer, is input to the main controller 101 of the printer 10 via the interface (I/F) 112, the photoconductor 20 and the intermediate transferring body 70 are rotated. Then, the read sensor for synchronization RS detects the

reference position of the intermediate transferring body 70 and outputs a pulse signal. The unit controller 102 executes the following control, taking the pulse signal that has been received as a reference.

< Step of Starting Counting Number of Yellow Pixels (Step 3) >

[0186] A latent image that corresponds to the yellow image information is formed on the charged photoconductor by the exposing unit 40. At this time, the pixel counter 127a starts counting the number of pixels that are input to the exposing unit 40.

< Step of Moving Yellow Developing Unit (Step 5) >

[0187] The rotary 55 is rotated, and the yellow developing unit 54 is moved to the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Yellow Developing Bias (Step 7) >

[0188] Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the yellow developing unit 54 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by yellow toner. The developing bias that is applied is a voltage obtained by superimposing an AC voltage and a DC voltage, as mentioned above. It should be noted that the developing bias may be applied to the developing roller before the yellow developing unit 54 arrives at the developing position, or the developing bias may be applied to the developing roller after the yellow developing unit 54 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Ending Application of Yellow Developing Bias (Step 9) >

[0189] At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the yellow developing unit 54 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the yellow developing unit 54 is ended.

< Step of Obtaining Number of Yellow Pixels (Step 11) >

[0190] The number of pixels that have been counted is obtained from the pixel counter 127a. The number of counted pixels is proportional to the amount of consumption of toner, and thus the amount of consumption of yellow toner YT can be found.

< Step of Reading and Storing Yellow Toner Remaining Amount (Step 13) >

[0191] The remaining amount of yellow toner YY that is stored in the RAM is read out from the RAM, and a value YYnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount YT from the remaining amount YY is stored in the RAM as the new remaining amount.

< Step of Starting Movement of Cyan Developing Unit (Step 15) >

[0192] The rotary 55 starts rotating so as to position the cyan developing unit 51 at the developing position.

< Step of Writing Information into Element 54a (Step 17) >

[0193] The value YYnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount YT from the remaining amount YY is written into the element 54a of the yellow developing unit 54. This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124b, without it being in contact with the element 54a which is moving. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the yellow developing unit 54 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

< Step of Starting Counting Number of Cyan Pixels (Step 19) >

[0194] A latent image that corresponds to the cyan image information is formed on the charged photoconductor by the exposing unit 40. At this time, the pixel counter 127a starts counting the number of pixels that are input to the exposing unit 40.

<Step of Ending Movement of Cyan Developing Unit (Step 21) >

[0195] The rotation of the rotary 55 for positioning the cyan developing unit 51 at the developing position is ended. Thus, the cyan developing unit 51 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Cyan Developing Bias (Step 23) >

[0196] Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the cyan developing unit 51 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by cyan toner.

< Step of Ending Application of Cyan Developing Bias (Step 25) >

[0197] At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the cyan developing unit 51 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the cyan developing unit 51 is ended.

< Step of Obtaining Number of Cyan Pixels (Step 26) >

[0198] The number of pixels that have been counted is obtained from the pixel counter 127a. The number of counted pixels is proportional to the amount of consumption of toner, and thus the amount of consumption of cyan toner CT can be found.

< Step of Reading and Storing Cyan Toner Remaining Amount (Step 27) >

[0199] The remaining amount of cyan toner CC that is stored in the RAM is read out from the RAM, and a value CCnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount CT from the remaining amount CC is stored in the RAM as the new remaining amount.

< Step of Starting Movement of Magenta Developing Unit (Step 29) >

[0200] The rotary 55 starts rotating so as to position the magenta developing unit 52 at the developing position.

< Step of Writing Information into Element 51a (Step 31) >

[0201] The value CCnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount CT from the remaining amount CC is written into the element 51a of the cyan developing unit 51. This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124b, without it being in contact with the element 51a which is moving. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the cyan developing unit 51 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

< Step of Starting Counting Number of Magenta Pixels (Step 33) >

[0202] A latent image that corresponds to the magenta image information is formed on the charged photoconductor by the exposing unit 40. At this time, the pixel counter 127a starts counting the number of pixels that are input to the exposing unit 40.

<Step of Ending Movement of Magenta Developing Unit (Step 35) >

[0203] The rotation of the rotary 55 for positioning the magenta developing unit 52 at the developing position is ended. Thus, the magenta developing unit 52 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Magenta Developing Bias (Step 37) >

[0204] Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the magenta developing unit 52 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by magenta toner.

< Step of Ending Application of Magenta Developing Bias (Step 39) >

[0205] At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the magenta devel-

oping unit 52 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the magenta developing unit 52 is ended.

< Step of Obtaining Number of Magenta Pixels (Step 41) >

5 **[0206]** The number of pixels that have been counted is obtained from the pixel counter 127a. The number of counted pixels is proportional to the amount of consumption of toner, and thus the amount of consumption of magenta toner MT can be found.

< Step of Reading and Storing Magenta Toner Remaining Amount (Step 43) >

10 **[0207]** The remaining amount of magenta toner MM that is stored in the RAM is read out from the RAM, and a value MMnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount MT from the remaining amount MM is stored in the RAM as the new remaining amount.

15 < Step of Starting Movement of Black Developing Unit (Step 45) >

[0208] The rotary 55 starts rotating so as to position the black developing unit 53 at the developing position.

< Step of Writing Information into Element 52a (Step 47) >

20 **[0209]** The value MMnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount MT from the remaining amount MM is written into the element 52a of the magenta developing unit 52. This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124b, without it being in contact with the element 52a which is moving. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the magenta developing unit 52 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where
25 it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

< Step of Starting Counting Number of Black Pixels (Step 49) >

30 **[0210]** A latent image that corresponds to the black image information is formed on the charged photoconductor by the exposing unit 40. At this time, the pixel counter 127a starts counting the number of pixels that are input to the exposing unit 40.

<Step of Ending Movement of Black Developing Unit (Step 51) >

35 **[0211]** The rotation of the rotary 55 for positioning the black developing unit 53 at the developing position is ended. Thus, the black developing unit 53 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Black Developing Bias (Step 53) >

40 **[0212]** Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the black developing unit 53 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by black toner.

< Step of Ending Application of Black Developing Bias (Step 55) >

45 **[0213]** At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the black developing unit 53 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the black developing unit 53 is ended.

< Step of Obtaining Number of Black Pixels (Step 57) >

50 **[0214]** The number of pixels that have been counted is obtained from the pixel counter 127a. The number of counted pixels is proportional to the amount of consumption of toner, and thus the amount of consumption of black toner BT can be found.

< Step of Reading and Storing Black Toner Remaining Amount (Step 59) >

55 **[0215]** The remaining amount of black toner BB that is stored in the RAM is read out from the RAM, and a value BBnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount BT from the remaining amount BB is stored in the RAM as the new remaining amount.

< Step of Starting Movement to Home Position (Step 61) >

[0216] Rotation of the rotary 55 is started so as to position the rotary 55 at the home position.

5 < Step of Writing Information into Element 53a (Step 63) >

[0217] The value BBnew obtained by subtracting the consumption amount BT from the remaining amount BB is written into the element 53a of the black developing unit 53. This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124b, without it being in contact with the element 53a which is moving. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the black developing unit 53 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

< Step of Ending Printing Operation (Step 65) >

15 [0218] When the rotary 55 arrives at the home position, the image forming process is ended, and the printer enters the image forming process standby state.

[0219] The process described above is only one example, and modifications to the above may be made freely as long as the printer-side antenna 124b, which serves as a writing member, can write information into the element of a developing unit during the period from when that developing unit arrives at the opposing position (developing position) until it arrives at the detaching position (attach/detach position) due to movement of the rotary 55.

[0220] In the case of a configuration in which developing units having an element and a developer containing section can be attached to and detached from the attach/detach section, there is a possibility that a developing unit attached to the attach/detach section may inadvertently be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e. In particular, since the amount of developer in a developing unit decreases when developing is carried out with that developing unit positioned at the opposing position, when that developing unit is detached before information about the amount of developer that has decreased is written to its element, it may not be possible to ascertain the amount of developer contained in the developing unit, for example.

[0221] Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, information about the remaining amount of developer, for example, is written into the element of the developing unit by the writing member during the period from when that developing unit arrives at the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the rotary 55, and thus, even if the developing unit is detached via the attach/detach opening 10e, the amount of developer contained in the developing unit, for example, can be accurately ascertained.

[0222] In particular, it is preferable that the writing member writes information into the element of a developing unit during the period from after developing of the latent image by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position has ended until when that developing unit arrives at the detaching position.

[0223] The amount of developer in a developing unit decreases when the latent image is developed by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, information is written to the element of the developing unit by the writing member during the period from after developing of the latent image by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position has ended until when that developing unit arrives at the detaching position. Consequently, information about the remaining amount, for example, based on the amount of developer that has been reduced by development is written to the element of the developing unit.

[0224] It is also preferable that the writing member writes information to the element of a developing unit during a period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the rotary 55.

[0225] With this image forming apparatus, the time from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position can be utilized to effectively write information.

[0226] Also, in the example described above, after the yellow developing unit 54 began moving from the developing position, first, the yellow developing unit 54 arrived at the attach/detach position where it can be attached and detached, and then when the rotary 55 rotated further, the cyan developing unit 51 upstream in the direction of rotation arrived at the developing position. However, it is also possible that after the yellow developing unit 54 has begun moving from the developing position, the cyan developing unit 51 upstream in the direction of rotation first arrives at the developing position, and then when the rotary 55 rotates further, the yellow developing unit 54 arrives at the attach/detach position where it can be attached and detached.

[0227] In this way, if, during the time that a developing unit starts moving from the developing position until it arrives at the attach/detach position, another developing unit adjacent to said developing unit on the upstream side in the rotating direction of the rotary arrives at the developing position, then it is preferable that the printer-side antenna 124b writes information to the element of the developing unit during a period until the other developing unit arrives at the

developing position. The printer-side antenna 124b writes information to the element of said developing unit during a period until the other developing unit arrives at the developing position, and thus even if, for example, the developing unit is forcibly detached after the other developing unit arrives at the developing position, information will have already been written to the element of said developing unit.

[0228] As described above, it is preferable that the printer-side antenna 124b writes information to an element when the AC voltage supply section 126a is not supplying AC voltage to the developing roller 510. By writing information at this timing, information can be written accurately without being affected by the noise caused by supplying AC voltage to the developing roller 510, for example.

=== Writing Information into Element of Photoconductor Unit ===

[0229] Next, the writing of information into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 is described with reference to Fig. 11. Fig. 11 is a flowchart showing an example in which information is written into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75. More specifically, an example is shown in which the number of sheets printed by each developing unit, that is, the number of sheets printed by each toner color, is written into the element 75a.

< Step of Standby for Image Forming Process (Step 101) >

[0230] When the printer 10 is turned ON, a predetermined initialization operation is performed, and the printer 10 enters an image forming process standby state. When an image signal, which is an image forming process command from the host computer, is input to the main controller 101 of the printer 10 via the interface (I/F) 112, the photoconductor 20 and the intermediate transferring body 70 are rotated. Then, the read sensor for synchronization RS detects the reference position of the intermediate transferring body 70 and outputs a pulse signal. The unit controller 102 executes the following control, taking the pulse signal that has been received as a reference.

< Step of Moving Yellow Developing Unit (Step 105) >

[0231] The rotary 55 moves so as to position the yellow developing unit 54 at the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Yellow Developing Bias (Step 107) >

[0232] Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the yellow developing unit 54 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by yellow toner. The developing bias that is applied is a voltage obtained by superimposing an AC voltage and a DC voltage, as mentioned above. It should be noted that the developing bias may be applied to the developing roller before the yellow developing unit 54 arrives at the developing position, or the developing bias may be applied to the developing roller after the yellow developing unit 54 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Ending Application of Yellow Developing Bias (Step 109) >

[0233] At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the yellow developing unit 54 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the yellow developing unit 54 is ended.

< Step of Starting Movement of Cyan Developing Unit (Step 115) >

[0234] The rotary 55 starts rotating so as to position the cyan developing unit 51 at the developing position.

< Step of Writing Information into Element 75a (Step 117) >

[0235] Information indicating that the number of sheets printed by the yellow developing unit 54 has increased by one sheet is written into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 as the "Number of Sheets Printed in Yellow" (see Fig. 8). This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124a, without it being in contact with the element 75a. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the yellow developing unit 54 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e. Also, as the method for writing information indicating that the number of sheets printed by the yellow developing unit 54 has increased by one sheet, it is possible to adopt, for example, a method of storing data indicating the total number of sheets printed by the yellow developing unit 54 in a RAM provided in the printer unit 10a and then writing, into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75, a value obtained by adding 1 to the above-mentioned data.

<Step of Ending Movement of Cyan Developing Unit (Step 121) >

[0236] The rotation of the rotary 55 for positioning the cyan developing unit 51 at the developing position is ended. Thus, the cyan developing unit 51 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Cyan Developing Bias (Step 123) >

[0237] Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the cyan developing unit 51 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by cyan toner.

< Step of Ending Application of Cyan Developing Bias (Step 125) >

[0238] At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the cyan developing unit 51 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the cyan developing unit 51 is ended.

< Step of Starting Movement of Magenta Developing Unit (Step 129) >

[0239] The rotary 55 starts rotating so as to position the magenta developing unit 52 at the developing position.

< Step of Writing Information into Element 75a (Step 131) >

[0240] Information indicating that the number of sheets printed by the cyan developing unit 51 has increased by one sheet is written into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 as the "Number of Sheets Printed in Cyan" (see Fig. 8). This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124a, without it being in contact with the element 75a. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the cyan developing unit 51 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

<Step of Ending Movement of Magenta Developing Unit (Step 135) >

[0241] The rotation of the rotary 55 for positioning the magenta developing unit 52 at the developing position is ended. Thus, the magenta developing unit 52 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Magenta Developing Bias (Step 137) >

[0242] Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the magenta developing unit 52 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by magenta toner.

< Step of Ending Application of Magenta Developing Bias (Step 139) >

[0243] At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the magenta developing unit 52 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the magenta developing unit 52 is ended.

< Step of Starting Movement of Black Developing Unit (Step 145) >

[0244] The rotary 55 starts rotating so as to position the black developing unit 53 at the developing position.

< Step of Writing Information into Element 75a (Step 147) >

[0245] Information indicating that the number of sheets printed by the magenta developing unit 52 has increased by one sheet is written into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 as the "Number of Sheets Printed in Magenta" (see Fig. 8). This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124a, without it being in contact with the element 75a. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the magenta developing unit 52 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

<Step of Ending Movement of Black Developing Unit (Step 151) >

[0246] The rotation of the rotary 55 for positioning the black developing unit 53 at the developing position is ended. Thus, the black developing unit 53 arrives at the developing position.

< Step of Starting Application of Black Developing Bias (Step 153) >

[0247] Application of a developing bias to the developing roller of the black developing unit 53 is started. Thus, the latent image formed on the photoconductor 20 is developed by black toner.

< Step of Ending Application of Black Developing Bias (Step 155) >

[0248] At a predetermined timing, application of the developing bias to the developing roller of the black developing unit 53 is ended. Thus, the operation of developing with the black developing unit 53 is ended.

< Step of Writing Information into Element 75a (Step 161) >

[0249] Information indicating that the number of sheets printed by the black developing unit 53 has increased by one sheet is written into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 as the "Number of Sheets Printed in Black" (see Fig. 8). This writing is carried out using the printer-side antenna 124a, without it being in contact with the element 75a. It should be noted that when this writing is carried out, the black developing unit 53 has not reached the detaching position (the attach/detach position) where it can be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

< Step of Ending Printing Operation (Step 165) >

[0250] When the rotary 55 arrives at the home position, the image forming process is ended, and the printer enters the image forming process standby state.

[0251] The process described above is only one example, and modifications to the above may be made freely as long as the printer-side antenna 124a, which serves as a writing member, can write information into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 during the period from when a developing unit arrives at the opposing position (developing position) until it arrives at the detaching position (attach/detach position) due to movement of the rotary 55.

[0252] In a configuration in which developing units having a developer containing section can be attached to and detached from the developing unit attach/detach sections, there is a possibility that a developing unit attached to the developing unit attach/detach section may inadvertently be detached via the attach/detach opening 10e. Here, in a configuration in which the photoconductor unit 75 has the element 75a and information related to the developing units is written to the element 75a, there is a possibility that the information stored in the element 75a will be incorrect if a developing unit is inadvertently detached via the attach/detach opening 10e.

[0253] Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, information is written to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 by the printer-side antenna 124a during the period from when the developing unit arrives at the opposing position until when it arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the rotary 55, and thus even when the developing unit is inadvertently detached via the attach/detach opening 10e, it is possible to keep the reliability of the information stored in the element 75a from being impaired.

[0254] In particular, as described above, it is preferable that the printer-side antenna 124a writes information to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 during the period from after developing of the latent image by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position has ended until when that developing unit arrives at the detaching position.

[0255] The amount of developer in a developing unit decreases when the latent image is developed by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit. Here, with the foregoing image forming apparatus, information is written to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 by the printer-side antenna 124a during the period from after developing of the latent image by the developer bearing body provided in that developing unit that has arrived at the opposing position has ended until when that developing unit arrives at the detaching position. Consequently, information about the remaining amount, for example, based on the amount of developer that has been reduced by developing, and the number of sheets printed by each toner color, for example, can be written to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75.

[0256] It is more preferable that the printer-side antenna 124a writes information to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 during a period from when the developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until when the developing unit arrives at the detaching position due to movement of the rotary 55.

[0257] With this image forming apparatus, the time from when a developing unit starts moving from the opposing position until it arrives at the detaching position can be utilized to effectively write information.

[0258] Also, in the example described above, after the yellow developing unit 54 began moving from the developing position, first, the yellow developing unit 54 arrived at the attach/detach position where it can be attached and detached, and then when the rotary 55 rotated further, the cyan developing unit 51 upstream in the direction of rotation arrived at the developing position. However, it is also possible that after the yellow developing unit 54 has begun moving from

the developing position, the cyan developing unit 51 upstream in the direction of rotation first arrives at the developing position, and then when the rotary 55 rotates further, the yellow developing unit 54 arrives at the attach/detach position where it can be attached and detached.

[0259] In this way, if, during the time that a developing unit starts moving from the developing position until it arrives at the attach/detach position, another developing unit adjacent to said developing unit on the upstream side in the rotating direction of the rotary arrives at the developing position, then it is preferable that the printer-side antenna 124a writes information to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 during a period until the other developing unit arrives at the developing position. The printer-side antenna 124a writes information to the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75 until the time that the other developing unit arrives at the developing position, and thus even if, for example, the developing unit is forcibly detached after the other developing unit arrives at the developing position, for example, information will have already been written to the element 75a.

[0260] As described above, it is preferable that the printer-side antenna 124a writes information to the element 75a when the AC voltage supply section 126a is not supplying AC voltage to the developing roller 510. By writing information at this timing, information can be written accurately without being affected by the noise caused by supplying AC voltage to the developing roller 510, for example.

[0261] It should be noted that the information written into the element 75a is not limited to the foregoing example, and as shown in Fig. 8, it can also be, for example, the number of printed sheets when usage starts, the number of printed sheets when usage ends, or the number of sheets printed in monochrome.

[0262] It may also be information about, for example, the remaining amount of toner or the usage amount of toner of each of the developing units. In this case, for example, in place of the step of writing information to the element of each of the developing units in Fig. 10, it is possible to provide a step of writing information into the element 75a of the photoconductor unit 75.

=== Other Embodiments ===

[0263] In the foregoing, developing units, for example, according to the present invention were described based on an embodiment thereof. However, the foregoing embodiment of the invention is for the purpose of elucidating the present invention and is not to be interpreted as limiting the present invention. The invention can of course be altered and improved without departing from the gist thereof and includes equivalents thereof.

<Printer-side Antenna>

[0264] As long as the longitudinal direction of the printer-side antenna for wireless communication with the elements of the developing units is in the direction of rotation of the rotary 55, the antenna may assume any configuration. It should be noted that if the rotary 55 employed as the moving body moves rotatively, then the longitudinal direction of the printer-side antenna being in the direction of movement of the moving body means that the longitudinal direction of the printer-side antenna is in a tangential direction at a position in opposition to the printer-side antenna in the rotation radius of the rotary 55. Fig. 12 is a diagram showing a first alternative embodiment of the printer-side antenna. In Fig. 12, a printer-side antenna 124c is provided at a position where it is in opposition to and extends over a first developing unit (the yellow developing unit 54) attached to a first attach/detach section and a second developing unit (the black developing unit 53) attached to a second attach/detach section that is adjacent to the first attach/detach section. Thus, wireless communication can be carried out more effectively with respect to the elements of the developing units that are attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the rotary 55. Also, in the example shown in Fig. 12, the printer-side antenna 124c is in opposition to a first element of the first developing unit (the element 54a of the yellow developing unit 54), but it is also possible for the printer-side antenna 124c to be in opposition to a second element of the second developing unit (the element 53a of the black developing unit 53) as well.

[0265] It is also possible to adopt a configuration such as that shown in Fig. 13 and Fig. 14. Fig. 13 is a diagram showing another embodiment regarding an arrangement for the elements. Fig. 14 is a diagram showing a second alternative embodiment of the printer-side antenna, and shows an arrangement seen from the inner side of the printer unit when the side of the printer unit 10a on which the first open/close cover 10b is provided is regarded as the front side.

[0266] In Fig. 13, the element 54a is provided on a lateral surface of the yellow developing unit 54. This lateral surface is the lateral surface that becomes the front end side in the attaching direction when the yellow developing unit 54 is attached to the printer unit 10a via the attach/detach opening 10e. In correspondence with this provision of the element 54a on the lateral surface of the yellow developing unit 54, a printer-side antenna 124d is provided in opposition to the element 54a, as shown in Fig. 14. More specifically, the printer-side antenna 124d is provided more to the outside than the element 54a in the direction of the rotation axis of the rotary 55, that is, more towards the inward direction of the printer unit 10a than the element 54a, without being in contact with the element 54a. Even with this arrangement, the printer-side antenna 124d, which is provided more to the outside than the element 54a in the direction of the rotation

axis of the rotary 55, can be used to effectively achieve wireless communication with respect to the elements of the developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the rotary 55.

[0267] It is also possible for the length of the printer-side antenna in the longitudinal direction to be shorter than the length of the element in that longitudinal direction. However, as in the foregoing embodiment, a configuration in which the length of the printer-side antenna in the longitudinal direction is longer than the length of the element in that longitudinal direction is advantageous in terms that it allows wireless communication with respect to the elements of the developing units attached to the attach/detach sections provided in the moving body to be achieved more effectively.

<Moving body>

[0268] The moving body is not limited to a rotary-type member that moves rotatively, and it may also be a member that carries out translation operation.

<Another Example of AC Voltage Application>

[0269] It is also possible to adopt a configuration in which the AC voltage supply section 126a supplies an AC voltage to the charging unit 30 via the charging unit drive circuit so that the charging unit 30 charges the photoconductor 20 in an alternating electric field. In this case, during the period from the start to the end of the image forming process, the printer-side antenna 124b can write information into the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section 126a is not supplying an AC voltage to the charging unit 30. Thus, information can be written accurately without being affected by, for example, noise caused by supplying the AC voltage to the charging unit 30.

[0270] It is also possible to adopt a configuration in which the AC voltage supply section 126a supplies an AC voltage to the first transferring unit 60 via the first transferring unit drive circuit. In this case, during the period from the start to the end of the image forming process, the printer-side antenna 124b can write information into the element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section 126a is not supplying an AC voltage to the first transferring unit 60. Thus, information can be written accurately without being affected by, for example, noise caused by supplying the AC voltage to the first transferring unit 60.

<Intensity of the AC Voltage>

[0271] The present embodiment is particularly effective in image forming processing in which there is a large difference between the maximum voltage value and the minimum voltage value applied by the AC voltage supply section 126a. For example, it is particularly effective in image forming apparatuses in which the difference between the maximum voltage value and the minimum voltage value is 1000 volts or more. When the difference between the maximum voltage value and the minimum voltage value of the AC voltage is 1000 volts or more, the electromagnetic noise that occurs also becomes large. In such image forming apparatuses, by writing information with the writing member into the element of a developing unit that is attached to the attach/detach section when the AC voltage supply section 126a is not supplying an AC voltage during the period from the start to the end of the image forming process, it becomes possible to accurately write information without being affected by, for example, the large amount of noise that is caused by supplying the AC voltage.

<Developing Unit>

[0272] The developing unit is not limited to a device of the configuration described in the foregoing embodiment, and it is applicable to any type of developing unit. The developing unit may be of any configuration as long as it has an element into which information can be written and a developer containing section. For example, the developing unit does not have to include a developer bearing body, and the developing unit may be provided in the printer unit 10a.

[0273] For example, it is possible to use any material as the developer bearing roller, such as magnetic material, non-magnetic material, conductive material, insulating material, metal, rubber, and resin, as long as it is possible to structure a developer bearing roller. For example, as the material, it is possible to use: metal such as aluminum, nickel, stainless steel, and iron; rubber such as natural rubber, silicone rubber, urethane rubber, butadiene rubber, chloroprene rubber, neoprene rubber, and NBR; or resin such as styrene resin, vinyl chloride resin, polyurethane resin, polyethylene resin, methacrylate resin, and nylon resin. Further, it is without saying that these can be used even if the upper layer of these materials is coated. In this case, as the coating material, it is possible to use, for example, polyethylene, polystyrene, polyurethane, polyester, nylon, or acrylic resin. Further, it is possible to use any form, such as an inelastic body, an elastic body, a single-layer structure, a multi-layer structure, a film, and a roller. Further, the developer is not limited to toner, but it may be, for example, a two component developer in which a carrier is mixed.

[0274] Further, the same applies for the toner supplying member as well, and as the material therefor, other than polyurethane foam described above, it is possible to use, for example, polystyrene foam, polyethylene foam, polyester foam, ethylene propylene foam, nylon foam, or silicone foam. It should be noted that, as the foam cells of the toner supplying means, both open-cell foams and closed-cell foams can be used. It should be noted that there is no limitation to foam material, and it is possible to use rubber material having elasticity. More specifically, it is possible to use a material that is molded and in which a conductive agent such as carbon is dispersed into, for example, silicone rubber, urethane rubber, natural rubber, isoprene rubber, styrene butadiene rubber, butadiene rubber, chloroprene rubber, butyl rubber, ethylene propylene rubber, epichlorohydrin rubber, nitrile butadiene rubber, or acrylic rubber.

<Photoconductor Unit>

[0275] The photoconductor unit 75 also is not limited to the device of the configuration described in the foregoing embodiment, and it is applicable to any type of device. It is only necessary that the photoconductor unit 75 has an element into which information can be written and a photoconductor. For example, it does not have to include the charging unit 30, and instead, the charging unit may be provided in the printer unit 10a. Further, the photoconductor is not limited to a roller-shaped photoconductive roller, and it may also be belt-shaped.

<Elements>

[0276] The elements of the developing units and the element of the photoconductor unit are not limited to the configuration described in the foregoing embodiment. It is only necessary that information can be written into them, and it is possible for them to be, for example, elements in which the antenna is provided separately.

<Image Forming Apparatus>

[0277] In the foregoing embodiment, an intermediate transferring type full-color laser beam printer was described as an example of the image forming apparatus, but the present invention is also applicable to various other types of image forming apparatuses, such as full-color laser beam printers that are not of the intermediate transferring type, monochrome laser beam printers, copying machines, and facsimiles.

=== Configuration of Computer System Etc. ===

[0278] Next, an embodiment of a computer system, a computer program, and a storage medium on which the computer program is recorded, which serve as an example of an embodiment of the present invention, is described with reference to the drawings.

[0279] Fig. 15 is an explanatory drawing showing an external structure of a computer system. The computer system 1000 comprises a computer unit 1102, a display device 1104, a printer 1106, an input device 1108, and a reading device 1110. In this embodiment, the computer unit 1102 is accommodated in a mini-tower type housing, but this is not a limitation. A CRT (cathode ray tube), a plasma display, or a liquid crystal display device, for example, is generally used as the display device 1104, but this is not a limitation. The printer described above is used as the printer 1106. In this embodiment, a keyboard 1108A and a mouse 1108B are used as the input device 1108, but this is not a limitation. In this embodiment, a flexible disk drive device 1110A and a CD-ROM drive device 1110B are used as the reading device 1110, but the reading device is not limited to these, and it may also be other devices such as a MO (magneto optical) disk drive device and a DVD (digital versatile disk).

[0280] Fig. 16 is a block diagram showing a configuration of the computer system shown in Fig. 15. Further provided are an internal memory 1202, such as a RAM inside the housing accommodating the computer unit 1102, and an external memory such as a hard disk drive unit 1204.

[0281] It should be noted that in the above description, an example in which the computer system is structured by connecting the printer 1106 to the computer unit 1102, the display device 1104, the input device 1108, and the reading device 1110 was described, but this is not a limitation. For example, the computer system can be made of the computer unit 1102 and the printer 1106, or the computer system does not have to comprise any one of the display device 1104, the input device 1108, and the reading device 1110.

[0282] Further, for example, the printer 1106 can have some of the functions or mechanisms of the computer unit 1102, the display device 1104, the input device 1108, and the reading device 1110. As an example, the printer 1106 may be configured so as to have an image processing section for carrying out image processing, a displaying section for carrying out various types of displays, and a recording media attach/detach section to and from which recording media storing image data captured by a digital camera or the like are inserted and taken out.

[0283] As an overall system, the computer system that is achieved in this way becomes superior to conventional

systems.

Industrial Applicability

- 5 **[0284]** According to a main aspect of the present invention, it is possible to achieve an image forming apparatus, a developing unit, and a computer system with which accurate communication can be carried out with respect to developing units etc. having elements.
- [0285]** Also, according to another main aspect of the present invention, it is possible to achieve an image forming apparatus and a computer system with which information can be accurately written into developing units etc. having elements.
- 10

Claims

- 15 1. An image forming apparatus comprising:
- a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of said attach/detach sections, and said developing unit has a developer containing section and an element with which communication is possible;
- 20 a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and
- an antenna for wirelessly communicating with said element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section;
- wherein a longitudinal direction of said antenna is in a direction of movement of said moving body.
- 25
2. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said moving body moves rotatively.
3. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
- 30 a length of said antenna in said longitudinal direction is longer than a length of said element in said longitudinal direction.
4. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
- said antenna is provided at a position that is in opposition to and extending over a first developing unit attached to a first attach/detach section and a second developing unit attached to a second attach/detach section that is adjacent to said first attach/detach section.
- 35
5. An image forming apparatus according to claim 4, wherein
- said antenna is provided at a position that is in opposition to at least either one of a first element provided in/on said first developing unit or a second element provided in/on said second developing unit.
- 40
6. An image forming apparatus according to claim 2, wherein
- said antenna is provided more to the outside than said element in a radial direction of rotation of said moving body.
- 45
7. An image forming apparatus according to claim 2, wherein
- said antenna is provided more to the outside than said element in a direction of a rotation axis of said moving body.
- 50
8. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
- said antenna is capable of wirelessly communicating with said element of the developing unit that is moving.
9. An image forming apparatus according to claim 8, wherein
- said antenna is used to write information wirelessly into said element of the developing unit that is moving.
- 55
10. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
- said antenna is capable of communicating with said element in a non-contact state with respect to said element.

11. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
said antenna is used to write, into said element, information indicating a remaining amount of developer
contained in the developing unit provided with that element.

12. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein
said antenna writes, into said element, information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the
developing unit provided with that element.

13. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein:
said image forming apparatus comprises an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage; and
during a period from a start to an end of an image forming process, said image forming apparatus writes
information into said element of the developing unit attached to said attach/detach section using said antenna
when said AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage.

14. An image forming apparatus according to claim 13, wherein:
said developing unit has a developer bearing body for bearing developer; and
said AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to said developer bearing body.

15. An image forming apparatus according to claim 13, wherein:
said image forming apparatus comprises a charging member for charging said photoconductor; and
said AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to said charging member.

16. An image forming apparatus according to claim 1, wherein:
said image forming apparatus comprises an attach/detach opening through which said developing unit is at-
tached to and detached from said attach/detach section;
in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where said developing unit is in
opposition to said photoconductor due to movement of said moving body, development of said latent image
with the developer contained in said developing unit is possible;
in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from said opposing
position due to movement of said moving body, detachment of said developing unit from said attach/detach
section via said attach/detach opening is possible; and
during a period from when said developing unit arrives at said opposing position until when said developing
unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said image forming apparatus
writes information into said element of said developing unit using said antenna.

17. An image forming apparatus according to claim 13, wherein
a difference between a maximum voltage value and a minimum voltage value of said AC voltage is 1000
volts or more.

18. An image forming apparatus comprising:
a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to
and detachable from each of said attach/detach sections, and said developing unit has a developer containing
section and an element with which communication is possible;
a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and
an antenna for wirelessly communicating with said element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach
section, wherein:

a longitudinal direction of said antenna is in a direction of movement of said moving body;
said moving body moves rotatively;
a length of said antenna in said longitudinal direction is longer than a length of said element in said lon-
gitudinal direction;
said antenna is provided at a position that is in opposition to and extending over a first developing unit
attached to a first attach/detach section and a second developing unit attached to a second attach/detach

section that is adjacent to said first attach/detach section;
 said antenna is provided at a position that is in opposition to at least either one of a first element provided
 in/on said first developing unit or a second element provided in/on said second developing unit;
 said antenna is capable of wirelessly communicating with said element of the developing unit that is mov-
 ing;
 said antenna is capable of communicating with said element in a non-contact state with respect to said
 element; and
 said antenna is used to write, into said element, information indicating a remaining amount or a usage
 amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with that element.

19. A developing unit comprising:

a developer containing section; and
 an element with which communication is possible,

wherein:

said developing unit is capable of being attached to and detached from an attach/detach section of a main
 body of an image forming apparatus that includes: a moving body provided with a plurality of the attach/detach
 sections, said developing unit being attachable to and detachable from one of said attach/detach sections; a
 photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed; and an antenna for wirelessly communicating with
 said element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section; and
 a longitudinal direction of said element is in a longitudinal direction of said antenna when said developing unit
 is attached to said attach/detach section.

20. A developing unit according to claim 19, wherein

said developing unit is capable of being attached to said attach/detach section of said moving body which
 moves rotatively.

21. A developing unit according to claim 19, wherein

a length of said element in said longitudinal direction is shorter than a length of said antenna in said longi-
 tudinal direction.

22. A developing unit according to claim 19, wherein

said element is capable of communicating with said antenna in a non-contact state with respect to said
 antenna.

23. A developing unit according to claim 19, wherein

said element stores information indicating a remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit
 provided with that element.

24. A developing unit according to claim 19, wherein

said element stores information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit
 provided with that element.

25. A developing unit comprising:

an element with which communication is possible using an antenna; and
 a developer containing section for containing developer,

wherein

a longitudinal direction of said antenna intersects with a longitudinal direction of said developing unit.

26. A computer system comprising:

a computer unit; and
 an image forming apparatus that is connected to said computer unit and that includes
 a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable

to and detachable from each of said attach/detach sections, and said developing unit has a developer containing section and an element with which communication is possible,
a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed, and
an antenna for wirelessly communicating with said element of the developing unit attached to the attach/detach section,

wherein a longitudinal direction of said antenna is in a direction of movement of said moving body.

27. An image forming apparatus comprising:

a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of said attach/detach sections, and said developing unit has a developer containing section and an element into which information can be written;
a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed;
a writing member for writing information into said element; and
an attach/detach opening through which said developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section,

wherein:

in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where said developing unit is in opposition to said photoconductor due to movement of said moving body, development of said latent image with the developer contained in said developing unit is possible;
in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from said opposing position due to movement of said moving body, detachment of said developing unit from said attach/detach section via said attach/detach opening is possible; and
during a period from when said developing unit arrives at said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said writing member writes information into said element of said developing unit.

28. An image forming apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

during a period from when a developer bearing body provided in the developing unit that has arrived at said opposing position ends developing said latent image until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position, said writing member writes information into said element of said developing unit.

29. An image forming apparatus according to claim 28, wherein

during a period from when said developing unit starts moving from said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said writing member writes information into said element of said developing unit.

30. An image forming apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

if, during the period from when said developing unit starts moving from said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position, another developing unit adjacent to said developing unit on the upstream side therefrom in a direction of movement of said moving body is to arrive at said opposing position, then

said writing member writes information into said element of said developing unit during a period until said other developing unit arrives at said opposing position.

31. An image forming apparatus according to claim 27, wherein:

said image forming apparatus comprises an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage; and
said writing member writes information into said element of the developing unit attached to said attach/detach section when said AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage.

32. An image forming apparatus according to claim 31, wherein:

said developing unit has a developer bearing body for bearing developer; and
said AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to said developer bearing body.

33. An image forming apparatus according to claim 31, wherein:

said image forming apparatus comprises a charging member for charging said photoconductor; and
said AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to said charging member.

34. An image forming apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said writing member writes information into said element in a non-contact state with respect to said element.

35. An image forming apparatus according to claim 31, wherein

a difference between a maximum voltage value and a minimum voltage value of said AC voltage is 1000 volts or more.

36. An image forming apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said writing member writes, into said element, information indicating a remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with said element.

37. An image forming apparatus according to claim 27, wherein

said writing member writes, into said element, information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with said element.

38. An image forming apparatus comprising:

a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of said attach/detach sections, and said developing unit has a developer containing section and an element into which information can be written;
a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed;
a writing member for writing information into said element; and
an attach/detach opening through which said developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section,

wherein:

in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where said developing unit is in opposition to said photoconductor due to movement of said moving body, development of said latent image with the developer contained in said developing unit is possible;

in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from said opposing position due to movement of said moving body, detachment of said developing unit from said attach/detach section via said attach/detach opening is possible;

during a period from when said developing unit starts moving from said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said writing member writes information into said element of said developing unit;

if, during the period from when said developing unit starts moving from said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position, another developing unit adjacent to said developing unit on the upstream side therefrom in a direction of movement of said moving body is to arrive at said opposing position, then

said writing member writes information into said element of said developing unit during a period until said other developing unit arrives at said opposing position;

said developing unit has a developer bearing body for bearing developer;

said image forming apparatus comprises an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage;

said AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to said developer bearing body;

said writing member writes information into said element of the developing unit attached to said attach/detach section when said AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage to said developer bearing body;

said writing member writes information into said element in a non-contact state with respect to said element;

a difference between a maximum voltage value and a minimum voltage value of said AC voltage is 1000 volts or more; and

said writing member writes, into said element, information indicating a remaining amount or a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with said element.

39. An image forming apparatus comprising:

a moving body provided with a plurality of developing unit attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit having a developer containing section is attachable to and detachable from each of said developing unit attach/detach sections;
a photoconductor unit attach/detach section to and from which a photoconductor unit can be attached and detached, wherein said photoconductor unit has a photoconductor and an element into which information can be written;
a writing member for writing information into said element; and
an attach/detach opening through which said developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section,

wherein:

in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where said developing unit is in opposition to said photoconductor due to movement of said moving body, development of a latent image formed on said photoconductor with the developer contained in said developing unit is possible;
in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from said opposing position due to movement of said moving body, detachment of said developing unit from said developing unit attach/detach section via said attach/detach opening is possible; and
during a period from when said developing unit arrives at said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said writing member writes information into said element of said photoconductor unit.

40. An image forming apparatus according to claim 39, wherein

during a period from when a developer bearing body provided in the developing unit that has arrived at said opposing position ends developing said latent image until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position, said writing member writes information into said element of said photoconductor unit.

41. An image forming apparatus according to claim 40, wherein

during a period from when said developing unit starts moving from said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said writing member writes information into said element of said photoconductor unit.

42. An image forming apparatus according to claim 39, wherein

if, during the period from when said developing unit starts moving from said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position, another developing unit adjacent to said developing unit on the upstream side therefrom in a direction of movement of said moving body is to arrive at said opposing position, then

said writing member writes information into said element of said photoconductor unit during a period until said other developing unit arrives at said opposing position.

43. An image forming apparatus according to claim 39, wherein:

said image forming apparatus comprises an AC voltage supply section for supplying an AC voltage; and
said writing member writes information into said element of said photoconductor unit attached to said photoconductor unit attach/detach section when said AC voltage supply section is not supplying an AC voltage.

44. An image forming apparatus according to claim 43, wherein:

said developing unit has a developer bearing body for bearing developer; and
said AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to said developer bearing body.

45. An image forming apparatus according to claim 43, wherein:

said image forming apparatus comprises a charging member for charging said photoconductor; and
said AC voltage supply section supplies an AC voltage to said charging member.

46. An image forming apparatus according to claim 39, wherein
said writing member writes information into said element in a non-contact state with respect to said element.

47. An image forming apparatus according to claim 43, wherein
a difference between a maximum voltage value and a minimum voltage value of said AC voltage is 1000 volts or more.

48. An image forming apparatus according to claim 39, wherein
said writing member writes, into said element, information indicating a remaining amount of developer contained in the developing unit.

49. An image forming apparatus according to claim 39, wherein
said writing member writes, into said element, information indicating a usage amount of developer contained in the developing unit provided with said element.

50. A computer system comprising:

a computer unit; and
an image forming apparatus that is connected to said computer unit and that includes
a moving body provided with a plurality of attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit is attachable to and detachable from each of said attach/detach sections, and said developing unit has a developer containing section and an element into which information can be written;
a photoconductor on which a latent image can be formed;
a writing member for writing information into said element; and
an attach/detach opening through which said developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section;
wherein, in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where said developing unit is in opposition to said photoconductor due to movement of said moving body, development of said latent image with the developer contained in said developing unit is possible; and
wherein, in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from said opposing position due to movement of said moving body, detachment of said developing unit from said attach/detach section via said attach/detach opening is possible;

wherein, during a period from when said developing unit arrives at said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said writing member writes information into said element of said developing unit.

51. A computer system comprising:

a computer unit; and
an image forming apparatus that is connected to said computer unit and that includes
a moving body provided with a plurality of developing unit attach/detach sections, wherein a developing unit having a developer containing section is attachable to and detachable from each of said developing unit attach/detach sections;
a photoconductor unit attach/detach section to and from which a photoconductor unit can be attached and detached, wherein said photoconductor unit has a photoconductor and an element into which information can be written;
a writing member for writing information into said element; and
an attach/detach opening through which said developing unit is attached to and detached from the attach/detach section;
wherein, in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at an opposing position where said developing unit is in opposition to said photoconductor due to movement of said moving body, development of a latent image formed on said photoconductor with the developer contained in said developing unit is possible; and
wherein, in a state in which said developing unit is positioned at a detaching position that is different from said opposing position due to movement of said moving body, detachment of said developing unit from said developing unit attach/detach section via said attach/detach opening is possible;

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wherein, during a period from when said developing unit arrives at said opposing position until when said developing unit arrives at said detaching position due to movement of said moving body, said writing member writes information into said element of said photoconductor unit.

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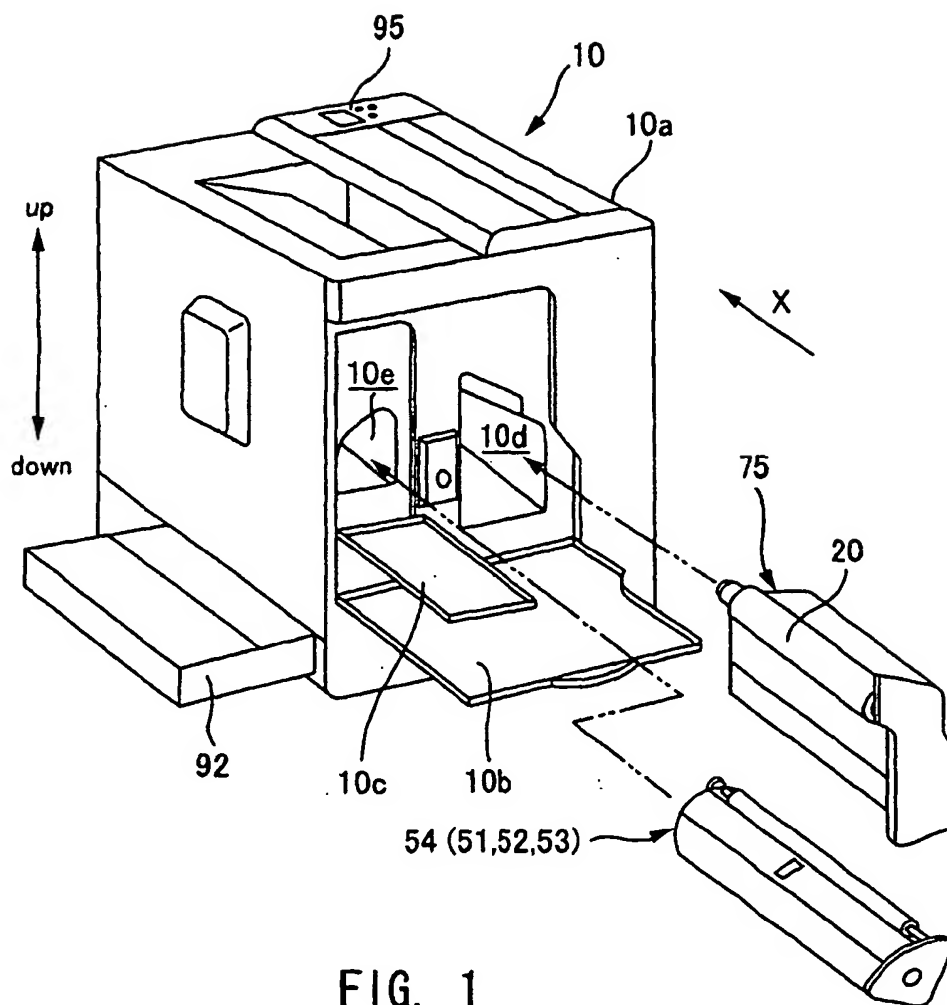


FIG. 1

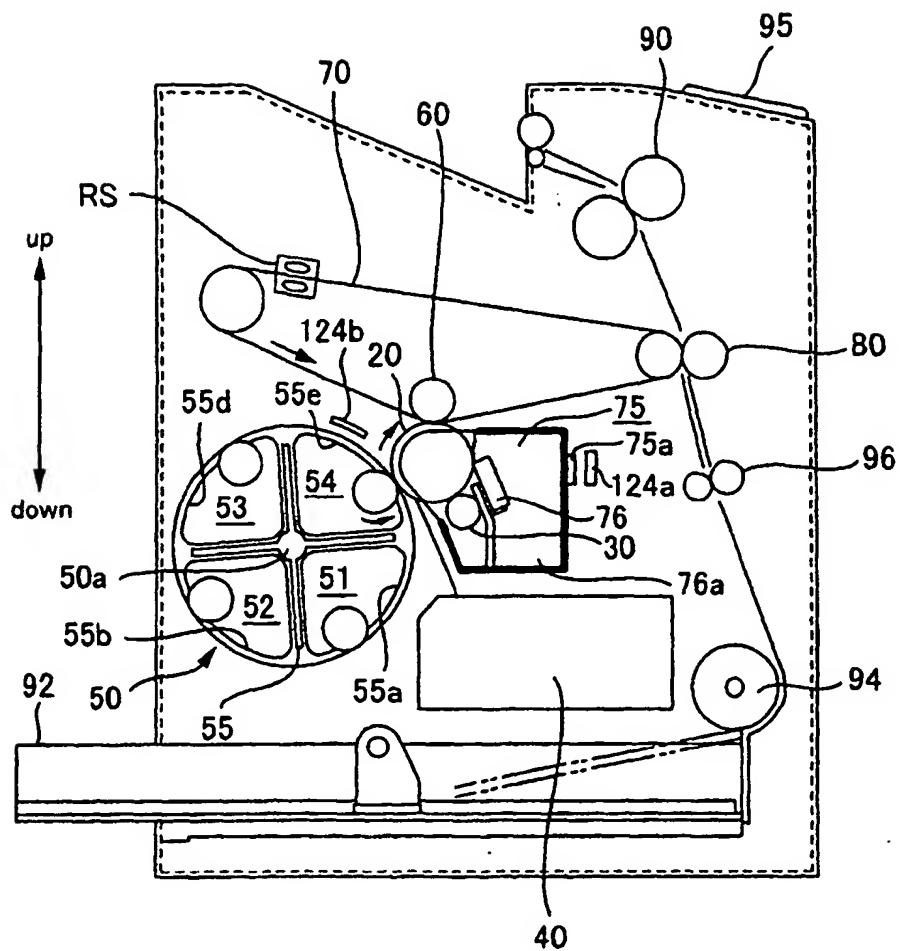


FIG. 2

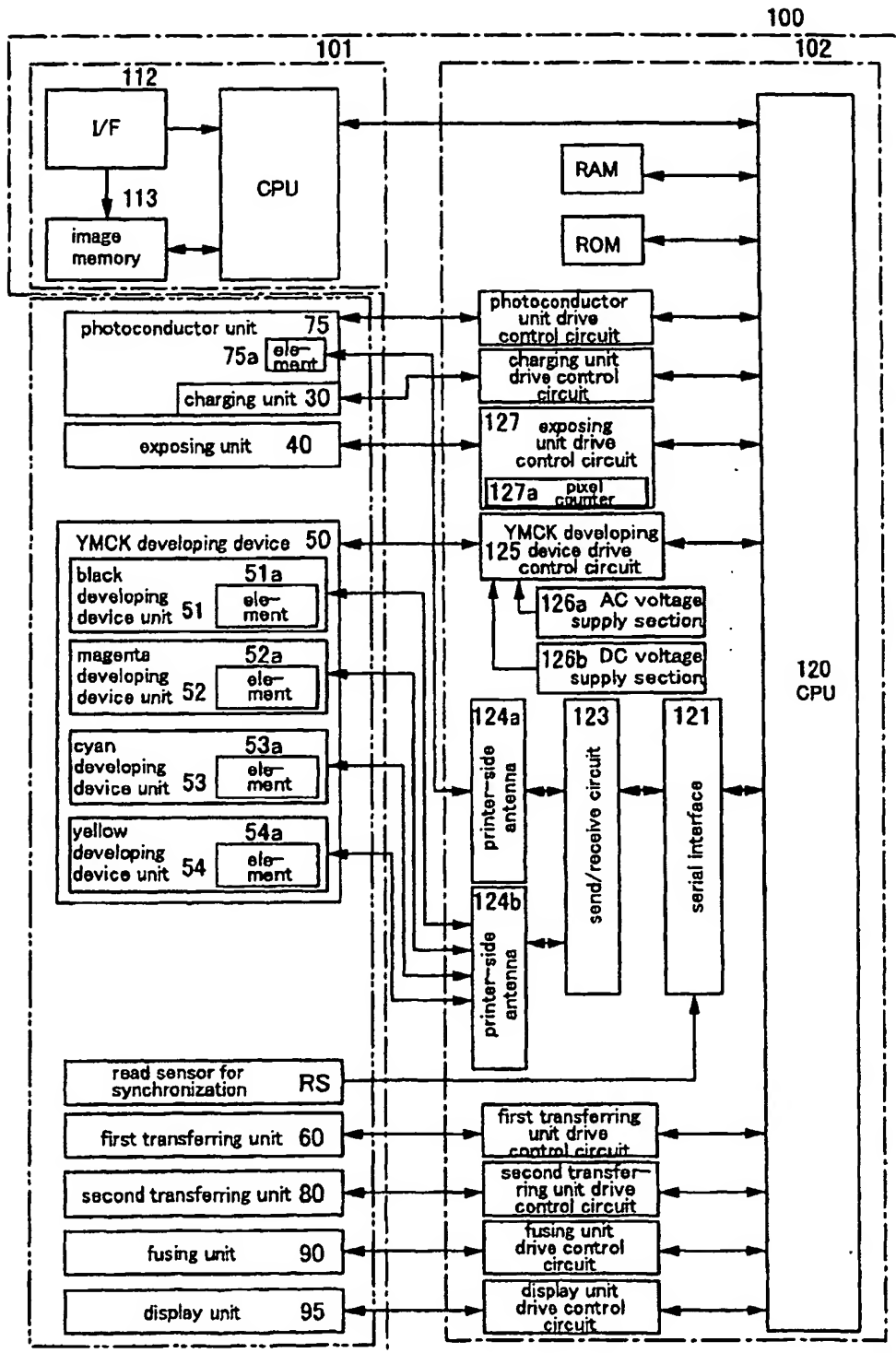


FIG. 3

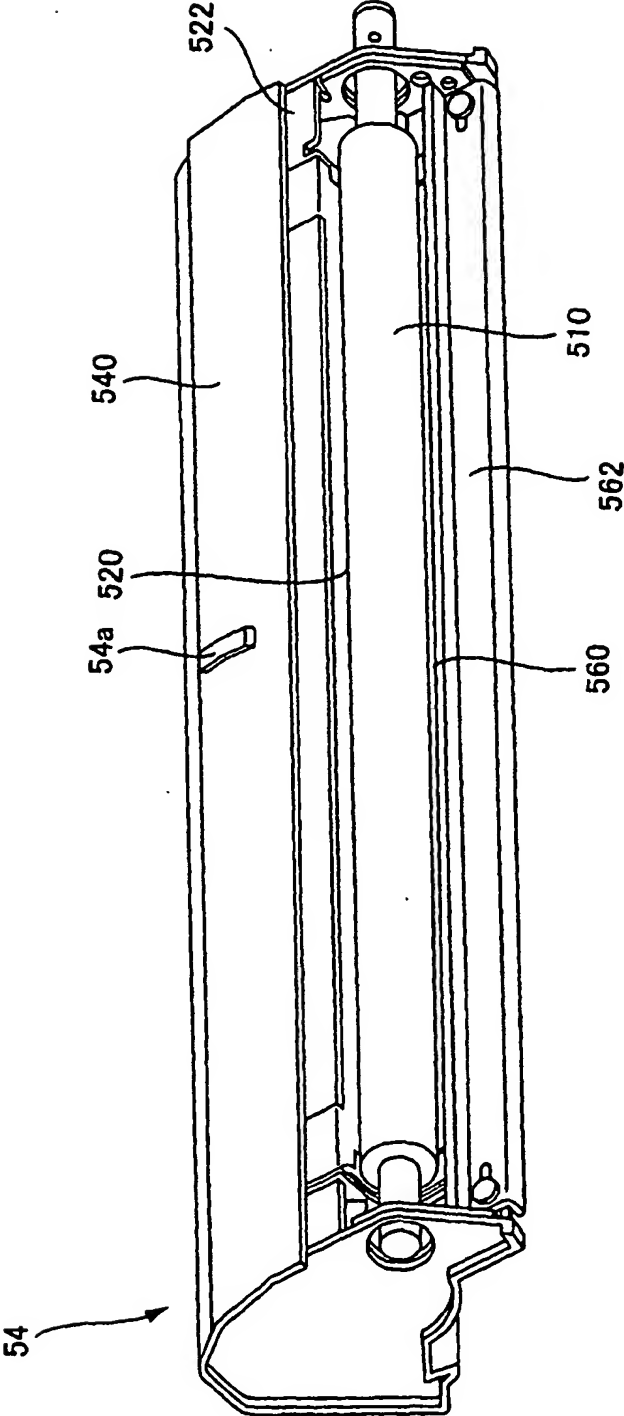


FIG. 4

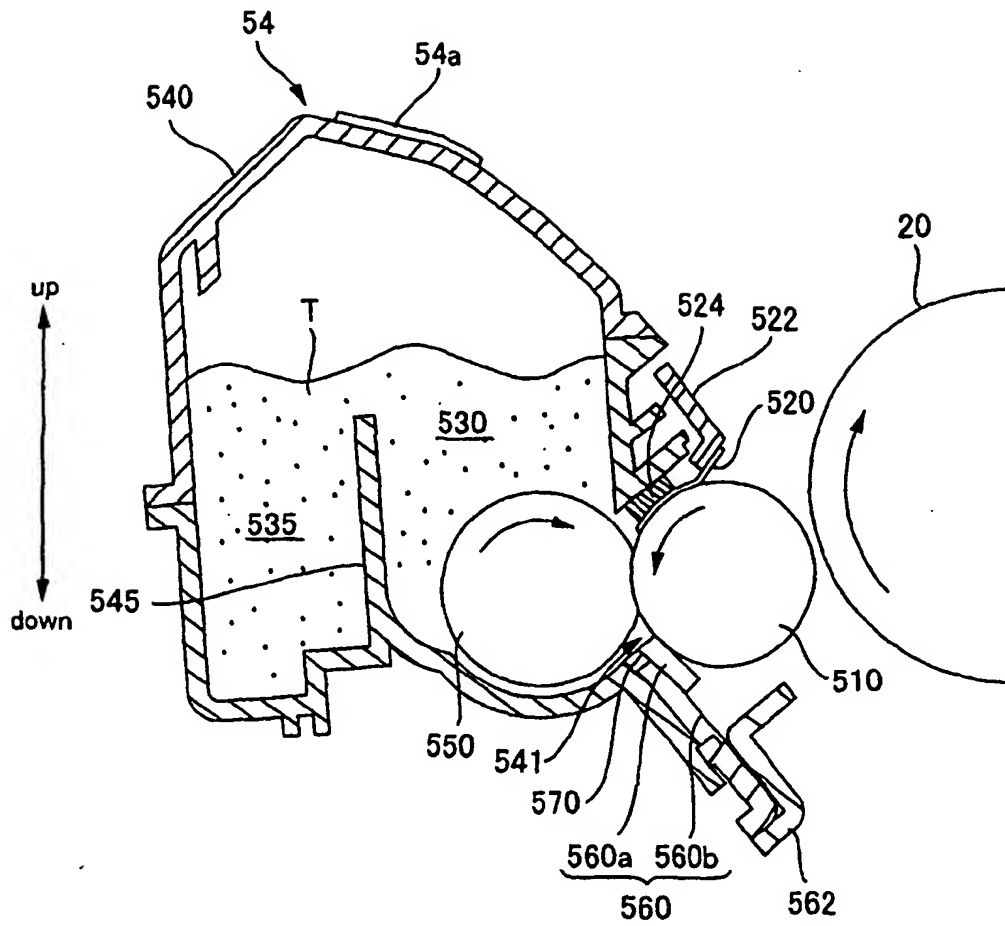


FIG. 5

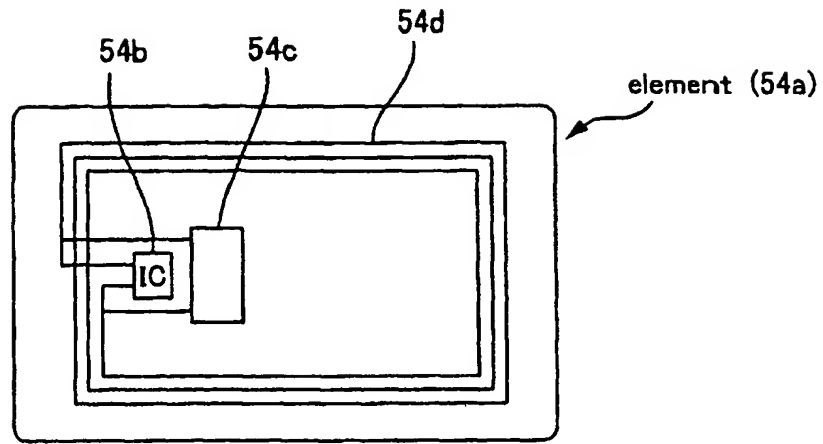


FIG. 6A

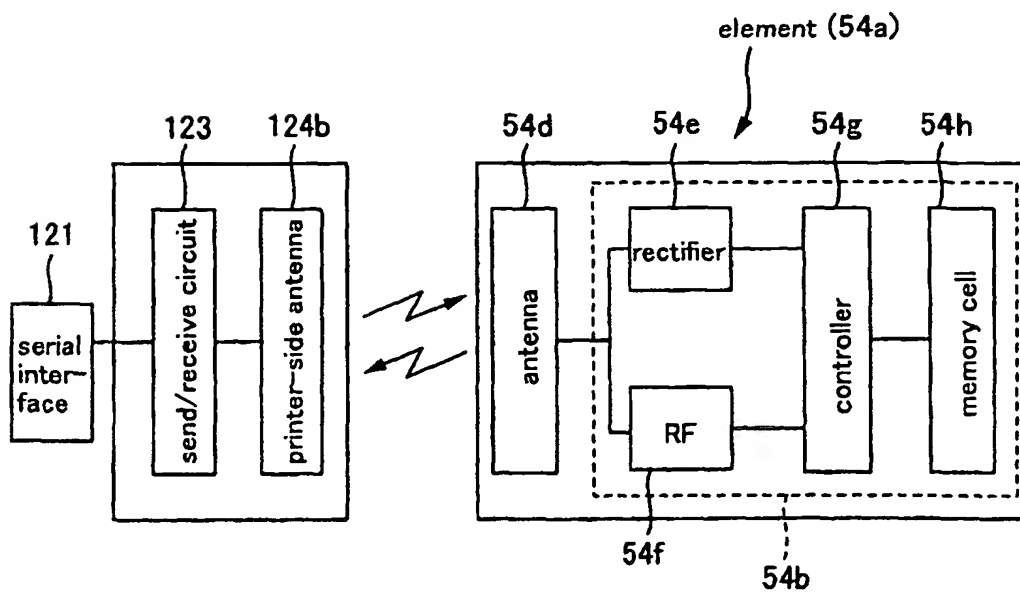


FIG. 6B

address	information content (8 bit)
00H	ID information
01H	manufacturing date
02H	destination
03H	manufacturing line
04H	compatible models
05H	toner remaining amount
⋮	⋮

FIG. 7

address	information content (8 bit)
00H	ID information
01H	manufacturing date
02H	destination
03H	manufacturing line
04H	compatible models
05H	number of sheets printed by main unit when usage starts
06H	number of sheets printed by main unit when usage ends
07H	number of sheets printed in color
08H	number of sheets printed in monochrome
09H	number of sheets printed in yellow
0AH	number of sheets printed in magenta
0BH	number of sheets printed in cyan
0CH	number of sheets printed in black
0DH ⋮ ⋮	⋮ ⋮ ⋮

FIG. 8

FIG. 9A

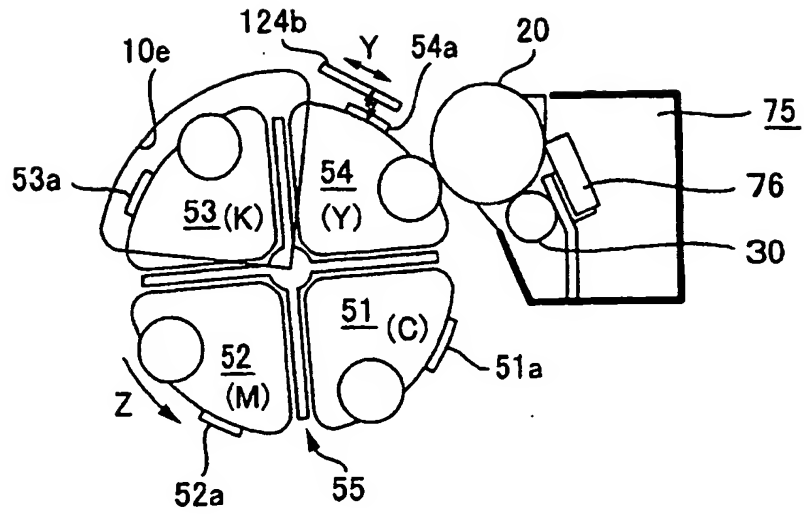


FIG. 9B

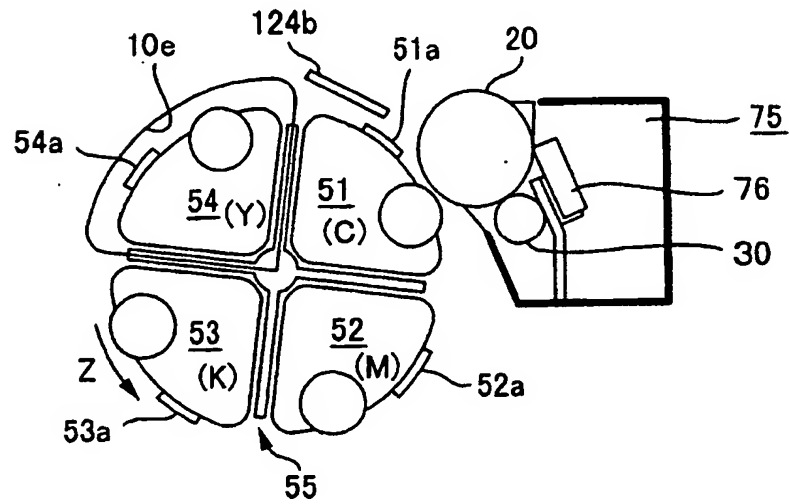


FIG. 9C

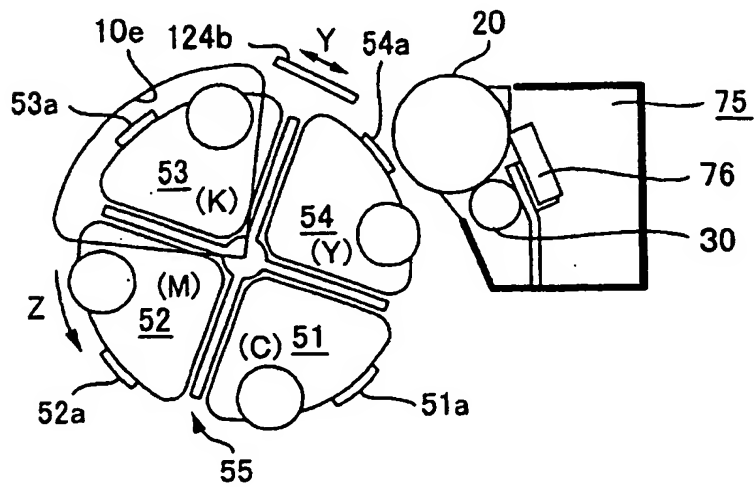
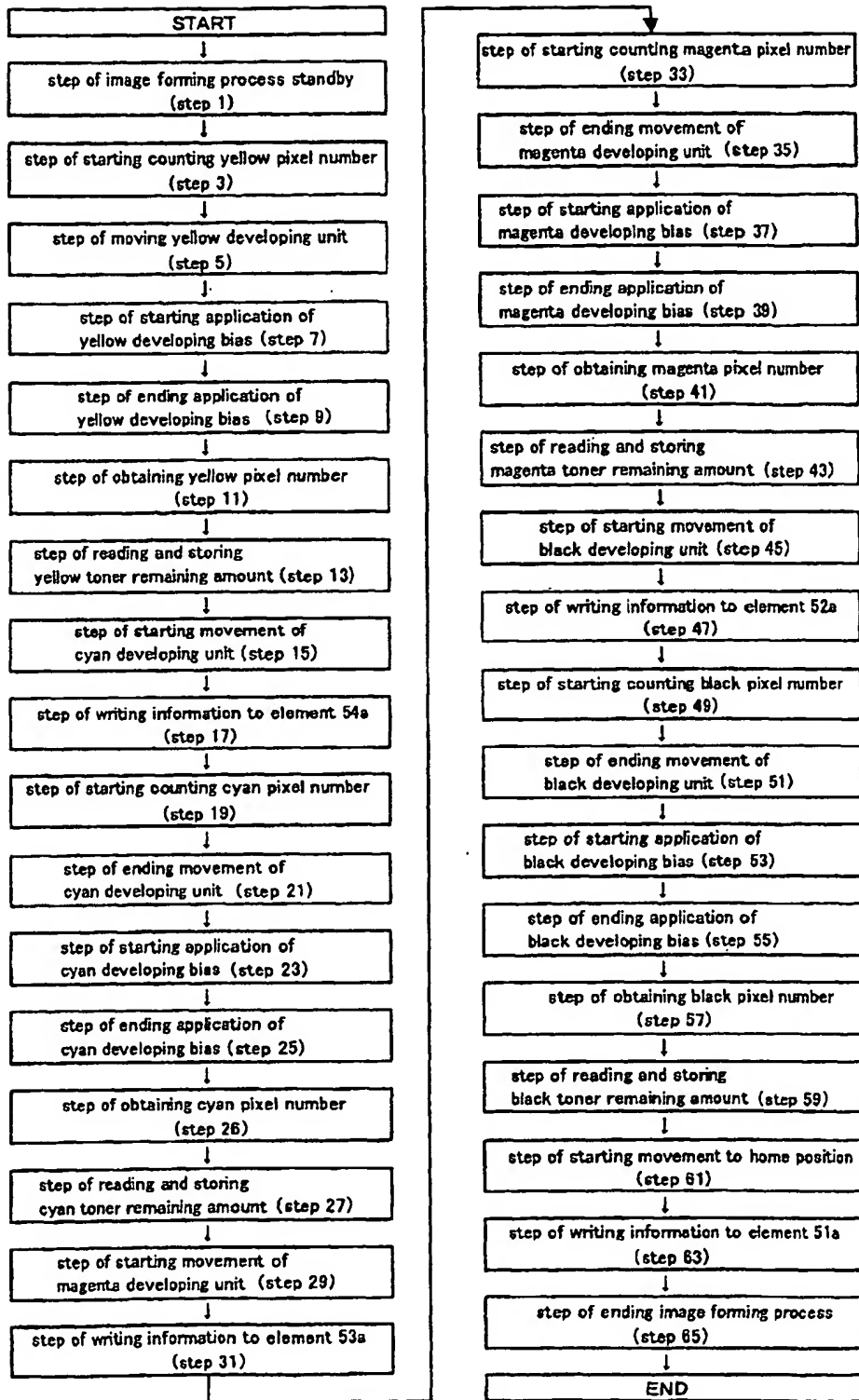


FIG. 10



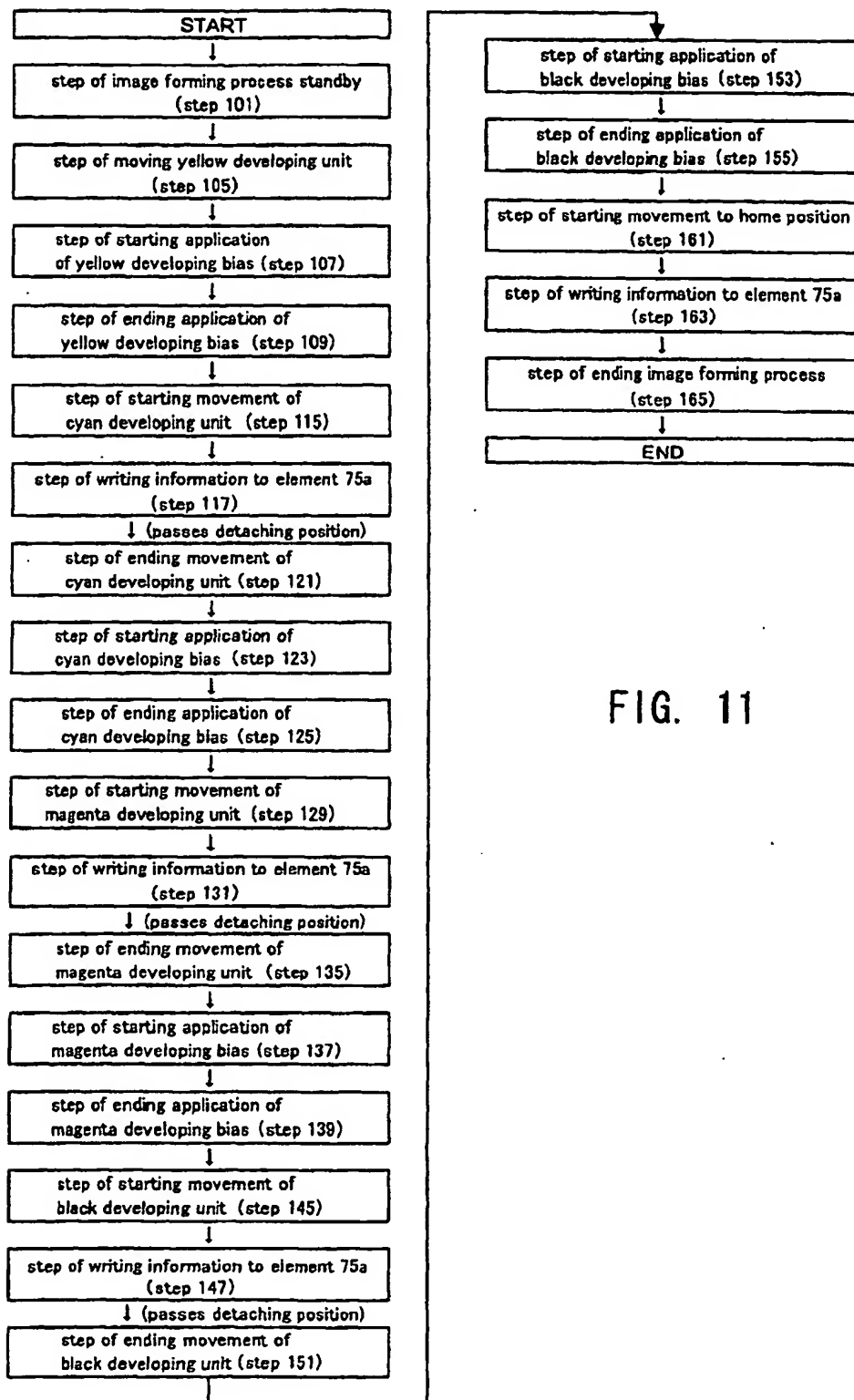


FIG. 11

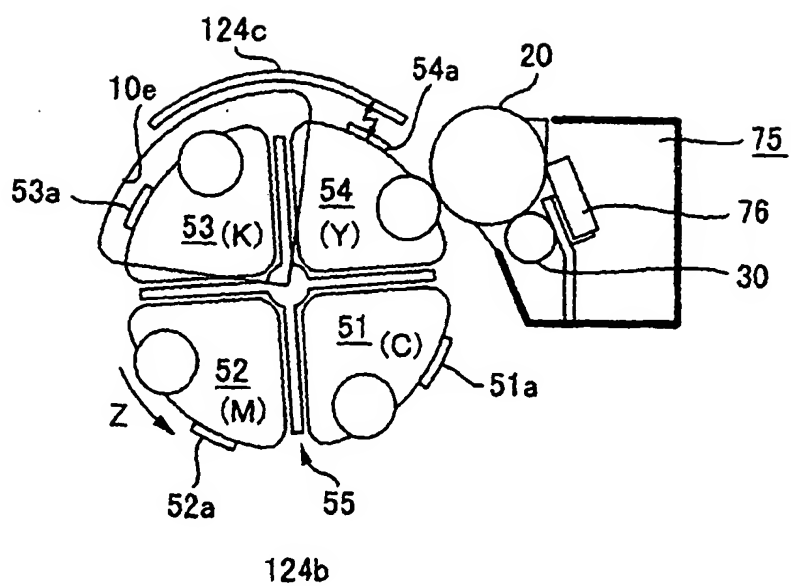


FIG. 12

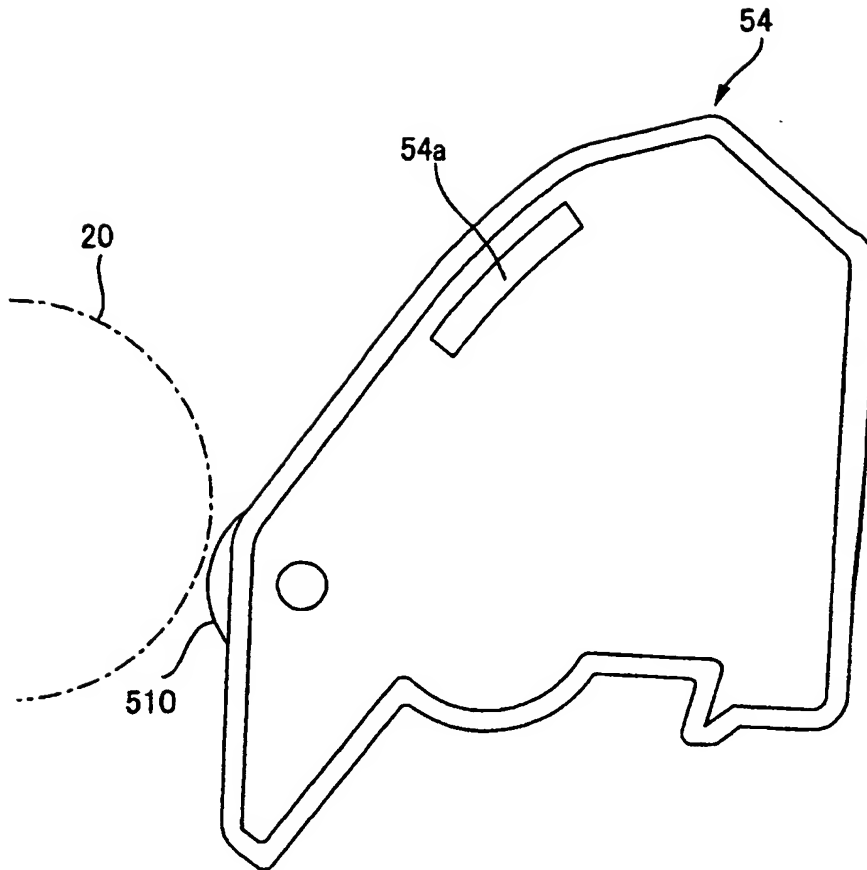


FIG. 13

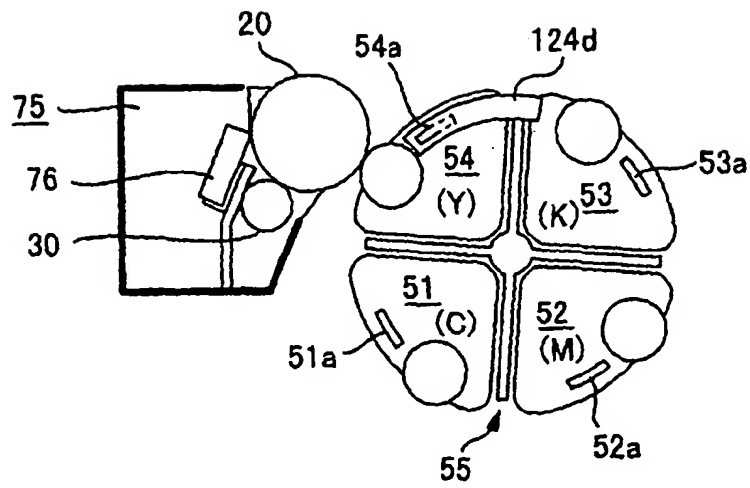


FIG. 14

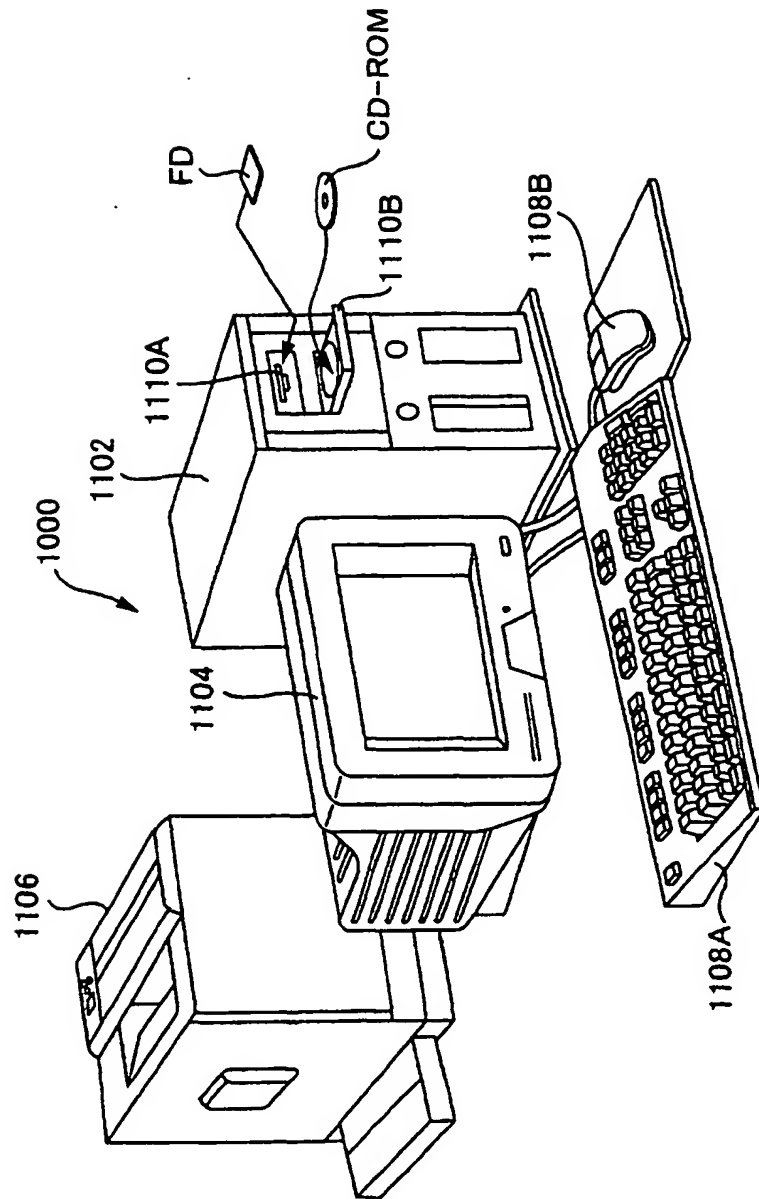


FIG. 15

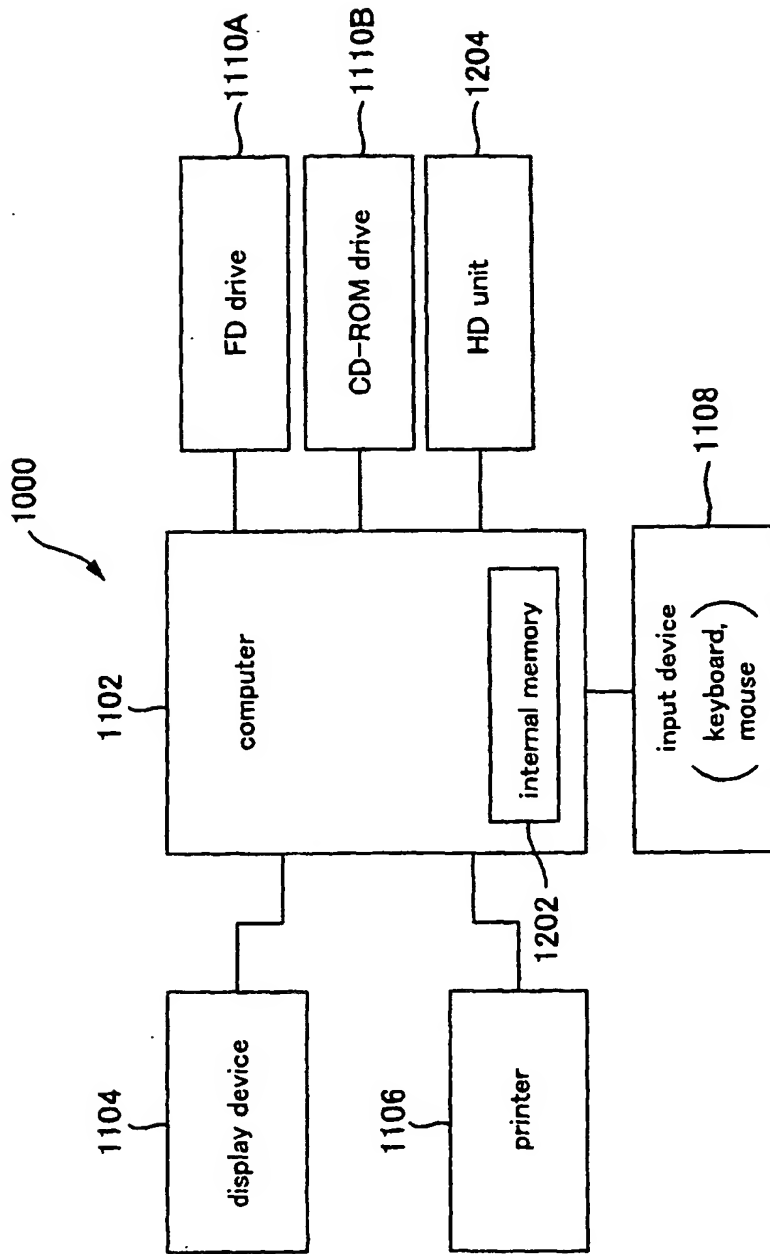


FIG. 16

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP03/04702

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER Int.Cl. ⁷ G03G15/00		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) Int.Cl. ⁷ G03G15/00-15/36, G03G21/00-21/20, G06K19/00-19/18		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1922-1996 Jitsuyo Shinan Toroku Koho 1996-2003 Kokai Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1971-2003 Toroku Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1994-2003		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	JP 11-338329 A (Canon Inc.), 10 December, 1999 (10.12.99), Full text; Figs. 1 to 14 (Family: none)	1-26, 34, 38, 46
A	JP 2001-209219 A (Canon Inc.), 03 August, 2001 (03.08.01), Full text; Figs. 1 to 11 (Family: none)	1-26, 34, 38, 46
A	JP 2001-344575 A (Denso Corp.), 14 December, 2001 (14.12.01), Page 2, right column, line 24 to page 3, right column, line 13; page 4, left column, line 17 to page 5, left column, line 24; Figs. 1 to 3 (Family: none)	1-26, 34, 38, 46
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
* Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "I" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 23 June, 2003 (23.06.03)		Date of mailing of the international search report 08 July, 2003 (08.07.03)
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Japanese Patent Office		Authorized officer
Facsimile No.		Telephone No.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP03/04702

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	JP 2001-353842 A (Dainippon Printing Co., Ltd.), 25 December, 2001 (25.12.01), Page 2, right column, line 43 to page 3, left column, line 31; Fig. 1 (Family: none)	1-26, 34, 38, 46
A	JP 2001-22230 A (Sharp Corp.), 26 January, 2001 (26.01.01), Page 4, left column, line 41 to right column, line 18; page 6, left column, line 19 to right column, line 27; Figs. 2 to 4 (Family: none)	4, 5, 18
A	JP 2002-62784 A (Fuji Xerox Co., Ltd.), 28 February, 2002 (28.02.02), Page 8, left column, lines 24 to 40; Figs. 1, 2 & US 2002/21909 A1	6, 12, 18, 24, 37, 49
A	JP 2002-49206 A (Canon Inc.), 15 February, 2002 (15.02.02), Page 4, left column, lines 37 to 45 (Family: none)	7
A	JP 10-240084 A (Canon Inc.), 11 September, 1998 (11.09.98), Page 3, right column, lines 14 to 26; page 5, left column, line 39 to right column, line 8; Fig. 1 (Family: none)	11, 18, 23, 36, 38, 48
A	JP 2002-72825 A (Canon Inc.), 12 March, 2002 (12.03.02), Page 7, right column, line 38 to page 8, right column, line 16; page 15, right column, line 40 to page 16, right column, line 5; Figs. 4, 9, 37 & US 2002/25185 A1	19
A	JP 9-190139 A (Canon Inc.), 22 July, 1997 (22.07.97), Claim 1; page 4, right column, line 46 to page 5, left column, line 12 & EP 784241 A2 & US 5926665 A	13-15, 17, 31-33, 35, 43-45, 47
A	JP 2002-14579 A (Canon Inc.), 18 January, 2002 (18.01.02), Page 3, left column, lines 30 to 37; page 4, right column, lines 32 to 39; page 5, left column, lines 17 to 25; page 7, right column, line 33 to page 8, right column, line 36 (Family: none)	13-15, 17, 31-33, 35, 43-45, 47

Form PCT/ISA/210 (continuation of second sheet) (July 1998)

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP03/04702

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
P, X P, A	JP 2002-333756 A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 22 November, 2002 (22.11.02), Page 5, right column, line 35 to page 6, left column, line 39 (Family: none)	27-30, 50 16, 31-49, 51

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP03/04702

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

The inventions of claims 1-12, 18-26 relate to a technical feature that the element provided on the development unit mounted on a mobile body so as to be moved increases a position range where communication with an antenna is possible.

The inventions of claims 13-15, 17, 31-33, 35, 38, 43-45, 47 relate to a technical feature that information can be written to an element with a high accuracy without being affected by the noise caused by AC voltage supply.

(continued to extra sheet)

1. ☒ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.

2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.

3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:

4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.
☒ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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PCT/JP03/04702

Continuation of Box No. II of continuation of first sheet(1)

The inventions of claims 16, 27-30, 34, 36, 37, 39-42, 46, 48-51 relate to a technical feature that correct information can be written to the element even when the development unit is carelessly removed via the attachment/detachment opening.